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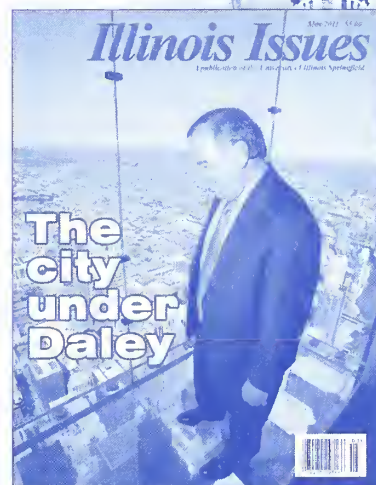
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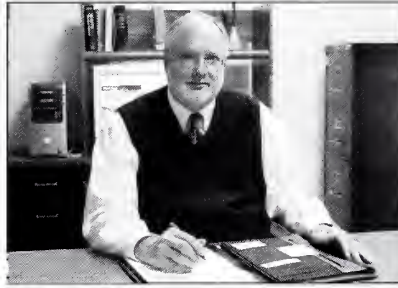
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Dana Heupel



Teachers must feel like targets in a shooting gallery

by Dana Heupel

They are overcompensated and underworked.

They siphon undeserved cash from state budgets, shortchanging essential needs such as human services or the health and safety of our citizens.

They are to blame for America's difficulty in maintaining its superior economic position among the world's nations.

They mostly fail in their primary job responsibility.

They are unable to cope effectively with the pressures brought on by normal societal changes.

They surely are the root of many — if not most — of the problems America will face in the future.

Who are they? Why, teachers, of course. And we need to do everything we can to chop off that root, so the problem doesn't continue to grow in coming years.

I have to say that I don't believe any of the above. But I may be in the minority. In Illinois and across America, teachers have become the scapegoat for a host of problems.

Many believe that America's declining educational achievement is due to teachers' inability to teach their students, no matter how unruly their charges; no matter how little support they get from many parents and taxpayers; no matter that parents who do support them often hover over their children like helicopters, questioning every decision teachers make; no matter that the federal government mandates constantly improving standardized test scores, dictating for the most part what teachers should teach if they want to keep their schools out of trouble.

The remedy for that, some state and federal officials say, is to base individual teachers' pay on the performance of their students on standardized tests. It's unclear whether those in poverty areas, where students traditionally do worse in school, would be graded differently from those in more affluent neighborhoods, or whether the aberrations that can occur from year to year in small classes would be taken into account.

But, hey, that's OK because, you know, teachers are overpaid, anyway. They only have to work nine months out of the year and collect a full year's pay. Well, according to the 2010-2011 Illinois Teacher Salary Study, prepared annually for the Illinois State Board of Education, the statewide median pay for a beginning teacher with a bachelor's degree is \$35,408. It's \$39,045 for a beginning teacher with a master's. For a teacher with a master's and 10 years of experience, it's \$48,703. For a teacher with a master's and maximum experience — which varies widely among schools but appears to fall normally in the 20 to 25 years range — the median is \$64,166. Those numbers, of course, also vary by geographic areas: higher in the northeast; lower downstate.

If those figures sound like a lot for nine months' work, consider that during that period, many teachers — if not most — put in well over 40 hours a week grading papers, chaperoning school events, attending extracurricular activities, preparing lesson plans

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and continuing their own education, along with teaching a full load of classes, one after another. Teachers who average, say, 50 hours a week — a not unrealistic figure, many teachers say, that includes an extra hour or so a day plus a weekend morning or evening — work essentially a full year during those nine months. If that still seems like too much pay, then subtract the 9.4 percent that teachers outside Chicago must contribute to their pensions and look at it again. Chicago teachers contribute 2 percent, and Chicago Public Schools pays 7 percent.

Yes, Illinois teachers don't contribute to Social Security; they can't by law. But, then again, they don't receive any Social Security payments when they retire; only those pensions.

Ah, pensions. They are the scapegoat's poster child, to mix a couple of metaphorical clichés that would make my former English teachers wince. Many believe that pensions for teachers and other public employees are the reason why so many state governments are reeling financially. And they have become the target of governors and legislators from New York to Wisconsin to California. Oh, and Illinois, as well.

It's unclear as of this writing what is likely to emerge from the Illinois General Assembly as the latest round of so-called pension reforms. But the stated goal is to reduce or eliminate state government's responsibility for future pensions — and most likely cut the pension benefits themselves — for current teachers and state employees. Of course, benefits for teachers and others hired after January 1 of this year were reduced — in comparison with those hired before then — through legislation passed last year.

There's no question that the state Teachers' Retirement System has a large unfunded liability. That is due primarily to lawmakers and governors reducing or skipping the state's required annual contributions to the system numerous times over the past couple of decades, while individual teachers continued to kick in 9.4 per-

cent of their salaries every year. Now, many lawmakers say teacher pensions are too generous — that they aren't in line with retirement benefits offered by private businesses.

According to the state Teachers' Retirement System, the average annual TRS retirement benefit for an Illinois teacher is \$42,782, not a generous amount when you consider that those who spent their entire careers in classrooms can't collect Social Security and invested nearly 10 percent of their pay into TRS along the way.

Daunting constitutional questions aside (see *Illinois Issues*, April 2011, page 3), if these so-called reforms are enacted and withstand court challenges, it would be just another bullet point on the list of reasons why current teachers and those considering entering the profession must feel like targets in a shooting gallery — and must be seriously reconsidering why they chose the path they did.

Are there abuses in school pay and pensions? Certainly, though most occur among administrators, not rank-and-file classroom teachers. Are there some bad teachers? We all know there are, and other legislation in which teacher unions had a voice (see page 9) attempts to address those concerns.

But it's state lawmakers and other elected officials, not teachers, who failed to make the required pension payments; who didn't adequately fund public schools, thereby creating conditions that often hinder rather than help students' learning; who signed off on the pensions in the first place.

And it's parents and voters who don't provide support at home for teachers in the classroom; who repeatedly reject tax referendums to improve local school conditions and then complain that Johnny and Jill are falling behind.

Elected officials, parents and voters who view teachers as the main cause of the shortcomings in public schools need instead to turn their gaze toward the nearest shiny surface.

Dana Heupel can be reached at heupel.dana@uis.edu.

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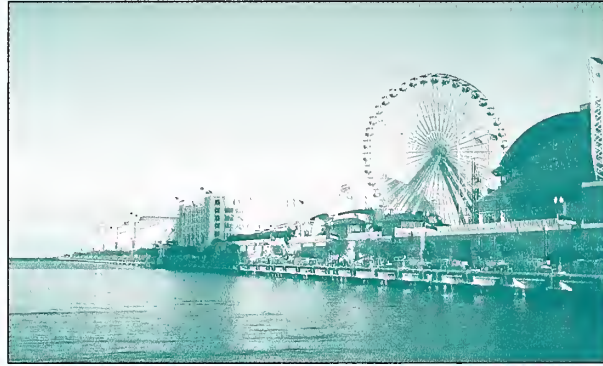
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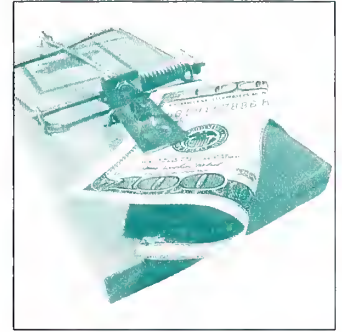
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Jamey Dunn



Lacking a workable federal guide, states attempt to address immigration

by Jamey Dunn

Pushed back on the agenda by health care reform and attempts to address the lagging economy, national immigration reform — a campaign pledge of President Barack Obama — has yet to materialize. At best, the federal government does not have a workable comprehensive guide for states on the issue, and at worst, it is sending them contradictory messages. Meanwhile, states across the country have started to address immigration in their own ways.

Perhaps the most infamous recent case of a state taking up immigration policy is Arizona's controversial law that, if courts allow it to go into effect, would require police officers to verify the citizenship or legal right to be in the country of anyone they apprehend and reasonably suspect to be here illegally. This means that under the Arizona law, if the police simply stop someone for a traffic violation and suspect that he or she is undocumented, they must "make a reasonable attempt" to determine whether the person is in the country legally. The law requires that the immigration status of persons arrested without identification must be verified by the federal government before they can be released. It would also allow citizens to sue law enforcement entities that they think are not doing enough to combat illegal immigration. Provisions of the law have been blocked by a federal court after the U.S. Department of Justice filed a lawsuit claiming the state had over-

stepped its bounds on immigration policy.

When defending the law, Arizona officials point to the fact that the federal government has stepped up cooperation with local law enforcement under Obama and former President George W. Bush as an indicator that state and local governments should play a larger role in controlling immigration.

"Congress contemplated state assistance in the identification of undocumented immigrants. We add, however, that Congress contemplated this assistance within the boundaries established in [federal law], not in a manner dictated by a state law that furthers a state immigration policy," Judge Richard Paez wrote in the appellate court's ruling. "Contrary to the state's view, we simply are not persuaded that Arizona has the authority to unilaterally transform state and local law enforcement officers into a state-controlled [Department of Homeland Security] force to carry out its declared policy of attrition."

The court found that Arizona's law had affected the United States' relations with Mexico by, among other things, causing that country to postpone a natural disaster emergency management agreement with the United States. The appellate court judges cited potential interference in international relations as a primary reason why states cannot set their own immigration policies. "That 50 individual

states or one individual state should have a foreign policy is absurdity too gross to be entertained," said Judge John Noonan, another jurist on the appellate court panel that heard the case. "In matters affecting the intercourse of the federal nation with other nations, the federal nation must speak with one voice."

Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer says she will appeal the ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court. Her recent signature on a bill also set a plan into motion to build more fencing on Arizona's border with Mexico using private donations for materials and prisoners for labor. The state plans to solicit donations through a website.

Arizona's legal battles have not deterred other states from delving into immigration policy. As of mid-May, 52 major pieces of legislation dealing with the topic of immigration had been introduced in 30 state legislatures, including Illinois. Illinois **House Bill 1969**, also dubbed the "Taxpayers Protection Act," contains many of the provisions of the Arizona law, including a requirement that police check the immigration status of individuals during traffic stops and before releasing anyone who has been arrested. Rep. Randy Ramey, a Carol Stream Republican, sponsors the bill, which is currently languishing in the Rules Committee with little-to-no chance of ever seeing daylight.

The Georgia legislature has approved a bill similar to Arizona's law. As of press

time, Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal said he intended to sign it into law. U.S. Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano dodged questions about whether the U.S. Justice Department would seek to block parts of that bill before they could go into effect, as it did with the Arizona law.

Napolitano said that states attempting to write their own immigration laws are incorrectly claiming that the federal government is doing nothing to address the problem.

"I think these efforts at the state-by-state level ... they're predicated on a falsity. The falsity is that there has been nothing done, that the border somehow is out of control. That is incorrect," she told Reuters news service in May.

However, Illinois officials say the feds are sending mixed messages about the intent of one enforcement policy. That is why Gov. Pat Quinn says Illinois will no longer participate in the federal Secure Communities Program, making it the first state signed on to the program that now wants to pull out entirely. Under the program, the fingerprints of any person who is arrested in a participating jurisdiction would be checked by the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency for immigration violations.

Quinn froze enrollment in the program last November, capping participation at the 26 counties that had already signed up. He has since notified the federal immigration agency that the state plans to pull them out of the program under the original contract's termination clause. Quinn took issue with the program because he says it is not doing what the feds say it was created to do: remove criminals that are in the country illegally.

The contract Illinois signed with the feds to participate in the program describes it as an "initiative that focuses on the identification and removal of aliens who are convicted of a serious criminal offense and subject for removal." But according to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement statistics, only about 20 percent of individuals removed from Illinois under the program as of February 28 have been convicted of a serious offense. "We said, 'Look, this isn't what we signed up for,'" says Brie Callahan, a Quinn spokeswoman.

Obama said at a recent town hall event

States attempting to write their own immigration laws are incorrectly claiming that the federal government is doing nothing to address the problem.

—Janet Napolitano

Homeland Security secretary

held by Univision that he has shifted the focus of his enforcement policy — which has resulted in the deportation of almost 800,000 people in the last two years, according to the *New York Times* — to criminals who are in the country illegally. "We have redesigned our enforcement practices under the law to make sure that we're focusing primarily on criminals. So our deportation of criminals are up about 70 percent. Our deportation of noncriminals are down. And that's because we want to focus our resources on those folks who are destructive to the community."

Callahan says Illinois signed on to the program because Quinn's administration shared the goal of removing "criminals convicted of serious crimes" from the country. She says Quinn is disappointed with the end result of deporting many people who may have been arrested on petty offenses but are far from hardened criminals, or people who were never convicted of a crime at all. "Being in the country illegally is a civil offense, not a criminal offense. ... For us, due process is very important."

She says using the program to deport individuals who were not the target of the original agreement strains law enforcement's relationship with the immigrant community and makes it less likely that immigrants in the state will report crimes or assist police in investigations for fear of being deported. "It's very important that to make our communities secure, that people feel that they can call the police and work with the police."

However, Napolitano says that states cannot opt out of a federal immigration policy, such as Secure Communities, any more than they can create their own. "Where immigration is concerned, the federal government fundamentally sets the policy. Just as states can't on their own have a [law like Arizona's] — this is kind of the flipside of that — nor can they exclude themselves from an enforcement tool that we are using."

Some local officials in California have claimed they were given the impression by the feds that they could choose to end their agreements to participate in Secure Communities. Rep. Zoe Lofgren of California, who serves on the U.S. House Judiciary immigration subcommittee, has called for an investigation into whether the Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency misled states and municipalities about the level of commitment they were making when they signed onto Secure Communities. California and Illinois lawmakers are considering legislation that would allow local jurisdictions to opt out.

The president renewed his push for immigration reform in May, saying that he wants to make a bipartisan effort to make the country more secure while "addressing the status" of the millions of people working in the country who do not have citizenship.

Illinois Democratic U.S. Rep. Luis Guterrez says he is encouraged by the message Obama is sending. "We're heading in the right direction. I'm more optimistic than I have been in recent memory," Gutierrez told National Public Radio. However, he says he is skeptical that the political appetite for immigration reform currently exists in Washington, D.C., since Democrats lost the majority in the U.S. House and failed during the lame duck session to pass bills such as the DREAM Act, which would have offered citizenship to children brought to the country illegally if they attend college or join the military. "It's very unlikely we're going to do it now."

Until comprehensive reform to immigration policy is passed at the national level and a clear protocol is given to the states, there will be more cases — like those in Illinois and Arizona — of states trying to sort things out for themselves, much to the chagrin of the feds. □

BRIEFLY

LEGISLATIVE CHECKLIST

As the deadline to pass a budget by a simple majority drew nearer, lawmakers continued to work to hash out a spending plan, as well as to draw a new map of legislative districts. Meanwhile, Gov. Pat Quinn signed a bill into law that will extend unemployment benefits. He also issued a veto that, if approved by the General Assembly, would push back the effective date of legislation that would put many of his appointees out of a job.



Unemployment

HB1030, PA 97-0001 Gov. Pat Quinn signed into law a bill that will allow extended benefits for workers under the unemployment insurance program and create a temporary funding source to make an interest payment on money Illinois borrowed from the federal government to keep its Unemployment Insurance Trust Fund afloat. The bill was sponsored by House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, and Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat.



Appointments

SB 0001 Gov. Pat Quinn took his veto pen to a measure lawmakers passed in February that would put executive appointees serving past their terms out of a job. This bill, sponsored by Senate President John Cullerton, a Chicago Democrat, and Senate Minority Leader Christine Radogno, a Lemont Republican, would automatically expel any appointees who have stayed in their jobs past their appointed terms. The governor could reappoint individuals currently serving past their terms, and they would have to be approved by the Senate. House Speaker Michael Madigan, a Chicago Democrat, and Minority Leader Tom Cross, an Oswego Republican, sponsored the measure in the House. Quinn's change to the bill would make the legislation effective in October instead of immediately.



Double-dipping

SB 1837 A proposal to end so-called double dipping that was sponsored by Sen. Thomas Johnson, a Winfield Republican,

would prohibit those serving on the Prisoner Review Board from holding any other salaried public office unless the job is a salaried teaching position in the individual's area of expertise at a public or private university, the Police Training Institute, a workshop or to juveniles committed to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice. The bill, which passed in the Senate, is sponsored in the House by Rep. Mike Fortner, a Republican from West Chicago.



Scholarships

HB 1353 Legislators' relatives, including relatives by marriage, would not be allowed to win General Assembly scholarships, under a measure sponsored by Rep. Robert Pritchard, a Hinckley Republican, and Sen. Kirk Dillard, a Hinsdale Republican. The bill passed the House in late April.



Trans fat

HB 1600 Restaurants and other food facilities would have to stop serving food with trans fat, under a proposal sponsored by Rep. La Shawn Ford, a Chicago Democrat, that would take effect in January 2013. The bill passed the House in April and was picked up by Sen. Donne Trotter, a Chicago Democrat. The bill excludes schools and government institutions from the ban, but it would bar public and private schools from selling foods containing trans-fat items in vending machines.



Prison census

HB 94 Inmates throughout the state would have been counted as residents in their hometowns rather than in areas where the prisons in which they are incarcerated are located, under a measure sponsored by Rep. La Shawn Ford, a Chicago Democrat. The bill failed in the House in April.



Sales tax

SB 2194 Sales tax, which can vary widely among local taxing bodies, would be collected from businesses at the local rate of the point of sale, under a measure sponsored

by Sen. Toi Hutcheson, an Olympia Fields Democrat, and Sen. Sue Rezin, a Morris Republican. The bill, which would make the office that processes orders the point of sale for businesses that have multiple offices in the state, passed the Senate in April. The legislation comes after a lawsuit in 2008 involving Hartney Fuel Oil Co., a gasoline distributor that is headquartered in Chicago with offices downstate.



Medical marijuana

HB 30 A tightened version of a measure, sponsored by Rep. Lou Lang, a Skokie Democrat, to allow individuals with cancer, glaucoma, HIV, AIDS, hepatitis C and other illnesses to possess no more than 2.5 ounces of cannabis for medicinal purposes each 14-day period was voted down by House members in May.



Local government

SB 173 A bill that would have created a commission to compile a list of local governments to be eliminated or consolidated failed. The measure was sponsored by Waukegan Democratic Sen. Terry Link.



HB 268 A commission of legislative members and local government representatives appointed by the governor would be required to report to the governor and legislature on lowering the number of local governments in the state, under a nonbinding measure sponsored by Rep. Jack Franks, a Woodstock Democrat, and Sen. Kwame Raoul, a Chicago Democrat. The commission would be supported by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. The bill, which passed in the House in April, would also repeal the Local Government Consolidation Commission Act.



Pregnant workers

SB 1122 This legislation, sponsored by Sen. Terry Link, a Waukegan Democrat, and Rep. Jack Franks, a Woodstock

Democrat, would prohibit any employer in the state from refusing to hire a woman based on a pregnancy or a related medical condition. The bill, which passed in the Senate, would also prohibit discrimination regarding promotions, training or a pregnant employee's employment renewal.

Drug overdose

SB 1701 People who seek medical attention for a drug overdose, as well as individuals who seek medical attention for another person who is experiencing an overdose, would not be prosecuted if drugs were found in their possession, under this bill sponsored by Chicago Democratic Sen. Ira Silverstein. The legislation, which passed in the Senate, would only apply to first-time offenders and also limits the amount of drugs possessed to be eligible for immunity from prosecution.

Driver education

SB 1643 School districts would be able to increase their driver education course fee to \$250 — from the current \$50 — through a vote by the local school board after a public hearing on the increase, under a bill sponsored by Sen. John Sullivan, a Rushville Democrat, and Rep. Sandra Pihos, a Glen Ellyn Republican. The bill, which passed both chambers in early May, would also require that the increased fee be waived for students who wish to participate in the course but are unable to pay the fee.

Concealed carry

HB148 Illinois residents would have been able to carry loaded firearms in such public places as parks and at street fairs, under a measure sponsored by Rep. Brandon Phelps, a Harrisburg Democrat, which failed to gain the necessary votes in the

House in May. The bill would have required concealed carry permit applicants to go through firearm safety training and a background check for mental illness and for criminal records.

Adoption

SB 1123 Religious organizations that administer foster care and adoptions for the state could have refused to place children with couples united by a civil union if such an adoption went against the agencies' beliefs, under a bill sponsored by Peoria Democratic Sen. David Koehler. The legislation also would have required an organization that refused to allow a couple to adopt to provide information on alternative adoption agencies or foster care programs. The bill failed to gain the necessary votes in a House committee.

Lauren N. Johnson

Major education reform package sent to governor

Sweeping education reform that changes the tenure process and the way teachers are hired, fired and laid off was approved by both legislative chambers, and, as of press time, awaited Gov. Pat Quinn's signature.

The measure, crafted earlier this spring after lengthy negotiations among lawmakers, reform groups, unions, teachers and school administrators, would allow districts to make hiring decisions based on performance evaluations, using seniority as a tiebreaker.

Currently, many schools use a last-in, first-out system when deciding on layoffs. The measure would also require that teachers earn consistently positive performance reviews to receive tenure. The legislation also mandates the state would review the licenses of teachers with at least two unsatisfactory reviews within a seven-year period.

The legislation, sponsored by Sen. Kimberly Lightford, a Maywood Democrat, and Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia, an Aurora Democrat, drew praise for the cooperative process that produced it. But the Chicago Teachers Union took issue with details that apply only to its members.

The union reportedly opposes a provision that would take away the group's bargaining rights over the length of the school day and also wants to ensure that certain disagreements could be taken to a mediator under the new process set out in the bill. The package also boosts the vote threshold for calling a strike in Chicago schools to 75 percent.

Chicago Teachers Union officials did not return a call seeking comment. Chicago Democratic Rep. Barbara Flynn Currie says she plans to work with the union and create another bill to address some of its concerns.

Rep. Monique Davis, a Chicago Democrat and the only House member to vote against the bill, says the measure is "discriminatory" to Chicago teachers and lawmakers who represent the area. "I do believe that the Senate sponsor has the same concerns for children that I do, but this bill does not address the concerns of children," she says.

"The intentions are good, but the results will not change a thing. I'm not going to be a union buster," she adds.

Proponents of the bill say it is a major step toward improving education in the state, but that more work focusing on students needs to be done. Jessica Handy, policy director for Stand for Children, a reform group that backed the bill through its passage in both chambers, says, "We're excited that **Senate Bill 7** will create historic education reform to keep the best teachers in the classroom, elevate the teaching profession and build vibrant school communities."

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan, former chief of Chicago Public Schools, also praised the measure.

"Illinois has done something truly remarkable, and every state committed to education reform should take notice," Duncan said in a written statement.

"Business, unions, educators, advocates and elected officials all came together around a plan that puts children ahead of adults and paves the way for meaningful education reform," Duncan said. "For some time now I have been saying that tough-minded collaboration is more productive than confrontation, and this is the proof.

"I respectfully urge Gov. Quinn to sign this quickly so that Illinois can put these landmark reforms to work in the classroom."

Lauren N. Johnson

Federal plan aims to deal with 'Amazon tax' issue

Sen. Dick Durbin is proposing a national plan similar to Illinois' so-called Amazon tax, but at least one former Illinois businessman says a possible federal solution comes too late.

When Gov. Pat Quinn signed a bill into law that requires Internet retailers to collect state sales taxes if they have marketing relationships with "affiliate" companies in the state, Amazon.com and Overstock.com cut their ties with such businesses in Illinois. Before Quinn signed the measure, opponents called on him to wait for a national solution, so online sellers would not flee the state to avoid the tax.

Now, Durbin is backing a bill in the U.S. Senate that would do just that. "We [want to] make this a national standard, that if you are going to sell to the residents of a state, you will collect the sales tax of the state of that resident," Durbin says.

Those who support making Internet retailers collect local sales taxes on their transactions say it is fair because stores with physical locations inside a state must collect local taxes. "It is clearly a question

of economic justice. How in the world can we ask all of these small businesses and localities to be collecting taxes and then exempt their competitors? It just doesn't make sense to me," Durbin says.

However, opponents say that forcing online stores to collect the tax will stifle economic growth. Republicans in the U.S. Congress have introduced a resolution in opposition to a national law. "The most effective thing we can do to help our economy recover is to remove the roadblocks standing in the way of our nation's job creators. At a time when we are trying to foster a sustained economic recovery, it doesn't make sense to saddle entrepreneurs with tax requirements that stifle growth," U.S. Rep. Dan Lungren, a California Republican who proposed the resolution, said in a written statement.

Durbin says a national push has failed in the past, but he thinks the climate has changed. He says a federal law would be one solution for the cash-strapped Congress looking to help out states with their own budget woes. "With our federal deficit, we're not going to have a big

bailout for you. But I do think we can help you collect revenue, which I think should be coming your way. It will be part of a helping hand."

Durbin says a national standard is needed because states with local tax collection laws face lawsuits and lose businesses when Internet retailers cut off marketing relationships with local affiliates. "Every governor is struggling to find a way to collect this tax legally, and there are impediments and obstacles. That's why we need federal legislation, so it applies across the board."

The Internet marketing company FatWallet moved from Illinois to Beloit, Wis., in April. According to chief executive officer Tim Storm, the move was a direct result of large retailers cutting ties with his company after the passage of the Illinois law. He says he doesn't know if the passage of a national law could pave the way for his company to come back to the state. "As far as a return to Illinois goes, it isn't an option at this point in time. If the situation changes, we will consider the options."

Jamey Dunn

Think tank leader calls for extension of income tax hike

Illinois' recent income tax increase should not phase out, as written into current law, and lawmakers should consider other tax increases to wipe out the state's deficit and fully fund social services, one budget expert says.

"I think it's disingenuous for [lawmakers] to have claimed that this is a four-year tax increase that is set to expire. They did the right thing by raising revenue. They did the wrong thing by making it temporary," says Ralph Martire, director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a think tank focused on budget policy. "I think one of the most disingenuous pieces of public policy that has been perpetuated on voters and taxpayers for decades now is that they can have public services and never have to pay for them. At some point, you need adequate sustainable revenue raised in a responsible way."

But lawmakers on both sides of the aisle say they intend for the income tax increase to remain temporary. Republicans have warned that massive budget cuts are needed to ensure that the increase can be phased out and the state can avoid future budget deficits. "We have laid out a plan that at the end of the day makes the tax increase that was passed in the middle of the night temporary. That is our goal, and we're anxious to participate in the discussion that accomplishes that goal in four years," says Senate Minority Leader Christine Radogno.

Martire says deep cuts are not the answer because they would have to come from vital government services that the public depends upon. "\$9 out of \$10 in the General [Revenue] Fund go to just four things — education, health care, human services and

public safety." He adds that human services programs have taken disproportionate cuts when compared with other areas of spending, and the state must find other ways to bring its budget in line. "There are rational options available on the table to close this budget gap."

Martire says lawmakers should not rule out other tax increases to bring in revenue. He says they should consider taxing retirement income, with an exemption for retirees under a certain income level.

Senate President John Cullerton proposed in March that legislators look at taxing retirement income, but only as a part of a plan to lower other tax rates. "I'm fully aware of the difficult politics of taxation. The only context in which such a policy could become reality would be if there was widespread bipartisan support, key protections for low-income retirees, and that the additional revenue would be used to lower overall taxes," Cullerton said in a prepared statement. Lawmakers did not move forward with such a plan.

Martire also advocates that the state begin taxing some services because Illinois has shifted in recent years to a more service-based economy. A recent report from the General Assembly's bipartisan Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability estimated that such a tax could bring in \$8.5 billion in annual revenue, or \$4 billion if business-to-business services were excluded. An income tax increase plan that also would have taxed some services failed in the House in 2009.

Jamey Dunn

Durbin, Kirk call for expansion of charter schools

Illinois' U.S. senators jointly introduced a bill to expand successful charter schools throughout the nation.

The bill calls for funding awarded through the U.S. Department of Education to be used to expand and replicate successful charter schools. The legislation seeks to promote accountability and transparency and better regulation of charter schools.

Similar legislation was introduced the same day in the House. As of press time, no funding was attached to the measure.

"We must ensure that each and every child has the opportunity to learn and thrive no matter where they live, and public charter schools have increasingly become an important part of that effort," Sen. Dick Durbin said in a prepared media release. "Not all charter schools succeed, but those that do can use the ALL-STAR (All Students Achieving Through Reform) Act to expand their reach."

More than 1.6 million students attend 5,000 charter schools in 40 states, according to the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. As of September, Illinois had 51 charter schools with 40,000 students.

"An opportunity to expand and access federal money would be helpful to any and all charter schools. ... I think the key there [is that] they are very careful in this proposed piece of legislation to say what is a successful charter school. They acknowledge not all charter schools are successful," says Frances Karanovich, an assistant professor of education leadership at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville and program director of the SIUE East St. Louis Charter School.

Sen. Mark Kirk said in the release, "This bill will help proven charter schools, such as the Noble Network of Charter Schools in Illinois, to thrive and expand their best practices that prepare our kids to compete on the global stage."

The Chicago-based Noble Network is a charter school system with 5,000 students at 10 high schools.

"We are the highest performing open enrollment high schools in the city, according to ACT scores. Ninety-five percent of our class went to college last year — the majority were first in their family to do so," says Michael Milkie, superintendent and CEO of the Noble Network. The average ACT at Noble was 19.5 in 2010, while the average score among Chicago Public Schools was 17.4.

Of charter schools in general, Milkie says: "I think that the best thing we're able to do is to use the freedoms that we have to attract great people. We're able to attract uncertified teachers, some of whom are extraordinary. We're able to hire uncertified principals, which opens up a much greater pool to us. We're able to pay based on performance. We're able to attract great leaders because of the freedom they get around budget and staffing and curriculum."

According to the joint media release from the congressional sponsors, the bill calls for priority to be "given to the top performing charter schools in each state [that]: have significantly closed achievement gaps; rank in at least the top 25th percentile in the state in achievement; meet benchmarks on an exam selected by the secretary of education; serve a high-need student population; have made adequate yearly progress for two of the last three consecutive years; and exceed the state graduation rate."

"My question is, what's the point? Why not expand public schools?" asks former Chicago public school teacher and administrator Monique Davis, a Democratic state lawmaker who opposes charter schools on principle.

Maureen Foertsch McKinney



Report shows pols used loophole in campaign finance law

Politicians slipped through a loophole in the law to avoid making some campaign contributions public until after the recent municipal elections, according to a report from a government watchdog group.

The report, *Piece by Piece, Check by Check*, from the Illinois Campaign for Political Reform (ICPR), shows almost \$500,000 in contributions to 190 recipients were not filed with the Illinois State Board of Elections until after the election.

Under the new campaign finance laws passed in 2009, candidates must report any contributions over \$1,000 within five days, or within two days if the contribution comes 30 days before an election. However, under the old rules if a donor gave multiple checks that totaled up to the \$500 threshold, then all the gifts would have to be disclosed. Candidates used to be required to immediately disclose only when a donation of \$500 or more came in 30 days before an election.

They are also required to disclose all contributions in a quarterly report. Before the new law, candidates filed contribution reports twice a year.

Under the new law, only single gifts are considered, so candidates and donors can

avoid the reporting requirement by giving multiple checks, as long as each is less than \$1,000. The contributions would appear in candidates' quarterly reports, but in the case of the most recent election, the reports came too late for such contributions to play into voters' decisions. "One of the reasons for supplemental disclosure, especially before elections, is so voters can know who the big donors are and ask: 'Is this a conflict of interest. Am I comfortable with this?'" says David Morrison, deputy director of ICPR.

According to the report, 505 donors gave small checks totaling amounts that would have broken the reporting threshold. In some cases multiple checks that totaled more than \$1,000 were given to the same candidate or party on the same day.

"If somebody gives a large check, the public will know. If somebody gives a bunch of little checks, the public won't know. And it really cheapens the disclosure."

Morrison says that there was some disagreement between lawmakers when the law was passed over whether contributions from a single donor would be aggregated or whether each check would stand alone.

"Our assumption was that they would continue to aggregate."

Senate Democrat Don Harmon, who sponsored the campaign finance reform legislation, says there was never any gray area when it came to lawmakers' intent. "With year-round real-time reporting the possibility of folks accidentally tripping into a problem by not aggregating was a very real concern. ... There is no confusion in my mind that all the stakeholders understood and agreed that aggregation was not a part of the law."

Harmon said the Illinois Campaign Reform Task Force, of which he is a member, should look into the ICPR's findings to see if they indicate a problem in the law. "Frankly, I am surprised that folks would go to that length to avoid disclosure. We have quarterly disclosure. There's really no way to hide contributions."

According to the report, "Chicago for Rahm, the campaign fund of Rahm Emanuel, shielded the most donations with the loophole. He avoided disclosure of \$26,000 until after the February 22 election, including \$15,375 received from eight donors, each of whom gave multiple checks on the same day." *Jamey Dunn*

Study shows gender gap in education

Female students are in danger of falling behind male students in math during their elementary school years, while boys have lower performance levels in reading, according to a new study from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Education professors Joseph Robinson and Sarah Lubienski delved into national longitudinal data on students in kindergarten through eighth grade, trying to determine at what grade levels gender gaps in reading and math typically appear and how the gaps differ among student performance levels. "All too often, though, this question is addressed by comparing the achievement of groups in one school subject, at a single point in time, usually some time after they entered school. However, to determine whether one group is losing ground relative to another group, we should begin measuring student achievement at the start of kindergarten and then follow the same children throughout their school careers," the study says.

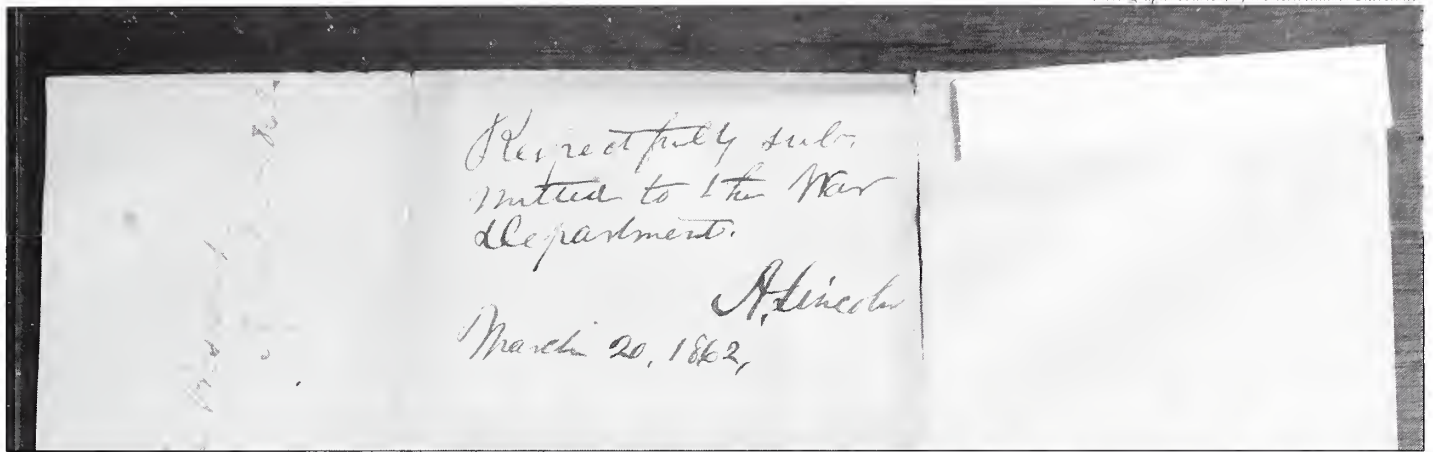
The study, published in the *American Educational Research Journal*, found that girls and boys, except for the highest performing kindergarten students, start off on the same foot when it comes to math comprehension. "If you just look at the average gap, there is no gap in math between boys and girls when they start kindergarten," Robinson said in a written statement. "But when you start to break it down throughout the distribution, taking a look at the low- and high-achieving girls and boys, that's where we see that there's a gap favoring boys at the

upper-most extreme of the distribution. The 99th percentile of boys is outscoring the 99th percentile of girls."

As children progress through elementary school, a gender gap in math performance widens, and the study shows that by third grade, it is evident among students at all learning levels. The researchers found that girls narrow the gap by middle school.

The study found that girls tend to excel over boys in reading. That gap also narrows over time, except among lower performing students. "Clearly, the boys start out behind the girls in reading achievement," Lubienski said in the statement. "In general, the mid-achieving boys eventually catch up, but the lowest achieving boys don't. In other words, if you're a boy and you're really struggling to read, you most likely won't catch up with your peers. It's those boys at the bottom that teachers should be most concerned about when it comes to reading."

The researchers also found that elementary school teachers tend to see girls as better students — even when their achievement levels are equal to boys' — possibly because of better classroom behavior. "We thought that teachers might rate boys higher in math, but we found that even when boys are outscoring girls, the teachers think the girls are outscoring the boys," Lubienski said. "This might be because girls tend to be perceived as 'good girls' in the classroom, and then teachers assume that they understand the material because they complete their work and don't cause trouble." *Jamey Dunn*



Lincoln signature turns up

When the University Union Lincoln Room at Western Illinois University changed its motif, a postcard portrait of Lincoln that originally hung in that student restaurant was donated to University Television (UTV) to be used as a prop, says UTV Associate Director Roger Kent.

For three years, it was in storage until Kent decided to hang it in his office. It hung there for two years, until one day, when he got the urge to examine it closer. Behind the portrait appeared to be a note bearing the signature of Abraham Lincoln. The paper said only: "Respectfully submitted to the War Department. A. Lincoln, March 20, 1862." Kent contacted the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield to examine the note.

"I thought it was interesting, and I had suspicions that the note that was visible in the frame could potentially be authentic," he says. He sent a scanned image to library curator James Cornelius.

"Based on the note's characteristics, Cornelius believed the note was authentic at first glance," Kent says. But Cornelius needed to see the document in person to be sure, he says.

In March, Kent met with Cornelius and two other archivists who verified the note's authenticity.

"It made me a little bit nervous and want to give it to someone who could take care of it, protect it and preserve it," Kent says. "I felt that the note belonged to the university, so I turned it over to Western's archives."

Cornelius says that by law, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum cannot estimate the value of documents.



Roger Kent, right, presents Kathy Nichols and Jeff Haucks of university archives at Western Illinois University with a document bearing an authentic Lincoln signature.

Western Illinois University senior library specialist Kathy Nichols tried to track down how the portrait and note ended up in the university's possession, but her search had few leads. The piece is no longer associated with property control, and records of it have not been found, she says.

"I actually doubt that we will ever know," Nichols says.

Lincoln documents can be split into two categories: those from his presidential period, which are of national importance; and those from his legal career in central Illinois. Legal documents usually have more local interest and turn up more frequently because there are more of them, Cornelius says.

"For a note that was previously unrecorded in the long list of Lincoln writings, [it] seems to me that we learn

of another one about maybe three times a year, but that varies ... that would be a rough average," he says.

Presidential and personal documents can be more difficult to authenticate. It is important to examine what Lincoln was doing around that time period and the kinds of issues he was dealing with. The document at Western was folded the way war documents would have been filed at the time, to fit in pigeonholes on somebody's desk, he says.

If there is an important date on a document, such as the day Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation, gave the Gettysburg Address or lost his life, you have to be suspicious, he says.

"One of the things forgers do is try to put a more important date on something," Cornelius says.

Kendall Cramer

BRIEFLY

Prof's study helps head injury victims

A nutrition professor at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign led a committee providing recommendations to the U.S. Department of Defense that will improve soldiers' recovery from head trauma suffered in active-duty service.

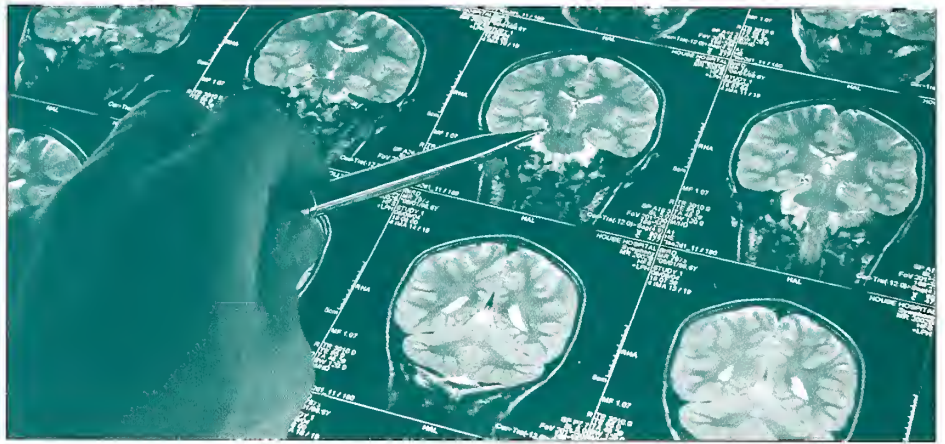
John Erdman Jr., professor emeritus in the Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition at UIUC, says research has shown that within the first 24 hours after a traumatic brain injury, patients need to receive at least 50 percent of their normal caloric intake, including a higher-than-normal amount of protein. The protein and the calories from glucose work faster in the body than fat reserves to reduce inflammation and swelling in the brain.

"These are severely injured people with many wounds, and medical staff are just trying to get them stabilized," he says. However, adding calories and protein to an IV or feeding tube in patients gives the brain and body nutrients to begin to heal in the first critical hours and days.

Erdman chaired a panel of experts chosen by the Institute of Medicine at the request of the Department of Defense. The committee's investigation and resulting report, *Nutrition and Traumatic Brain Injury: Improving Acute and Subacute Health Outcomes in Military Personnel*, began with the fact that military personnel, especially those in combat zones, face a distinct risk of traumatic brain injury (TBI). The injuries can range from mild to severe, and the effects can appear within minutes or hours — or sometimes weeks or even years later.

According to the report, the available data show TBI to be a significant cause of mortality and morbidity in the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. In one estimate, 10 percent to 20 percent of returning veterans have sustained a TBI, while other estimates suggest that TBI accounts for up to one-third of combat-related injuries.

TBI also is a major problem among civilians, contributing to nearly one-third of all injury-related deaths in the United States each year. Sports — from football to hockey, from bicycling to skateboarding, and many in between and in the extremes — contribute to an estimated 1.6 million to 3.8 million sports-related traumatic brain injuries annually.



Erdman says the committee was asked to focus on the potential role of nutrition in improving health outcomes in the short term, soon after an injury happens, rather than on the long-term effects. Acute effects occur within minutes of injury, while subacute effects occur within the first 24 hours.

Erdman says that lives might be saved by altering critical care guidelines to require providing more calories and protein within the first 24 hours and continuing the treatment for two weeks. Such nutritional intervention is likely to limit the person's inflammatory response, which typically is at its peak during the first two weeks after an injury.

Research has shown that feeding the severely injured person soon after an injury helps reduce inflammation in the brain, which can result in severe damage or death. The committee's report points out the need to learn more about the effects of insulin therapy and about nutrition goals after the first two weeks of injury.

Erdman says the committee identified some nutritional interventions that also may help improve recovery from brain trauma. He says the committee sees the most promise in the B vitamin choline, which is in high concentration in the brain. Another is creatine, a dietary supplement frequently used by weight lifters. Also in high concentration in the brain are n-3 fatty acids, which the body doesn't produce and have to come from such foods as salmon and tuna. N-3 fatty acids are essential to brain function and help reduce inflammation. Studies have also shown zinc to be essential to brain function.

"These compounds should be investigated further," Erdman says. The Department of Defense, he says, asked for that kind of

focus, so that it could target limited resources to help the most-severely wounded soldiers.

The Institute of Medicine is one of the National Academies, which also include the National Academy of Sciences (begun by President Abraham Lincoln), the National Academy of Engineering and the National Research Council. They are private, nonprofit institutions that provide expert advice on challenges facing the nation and the world.

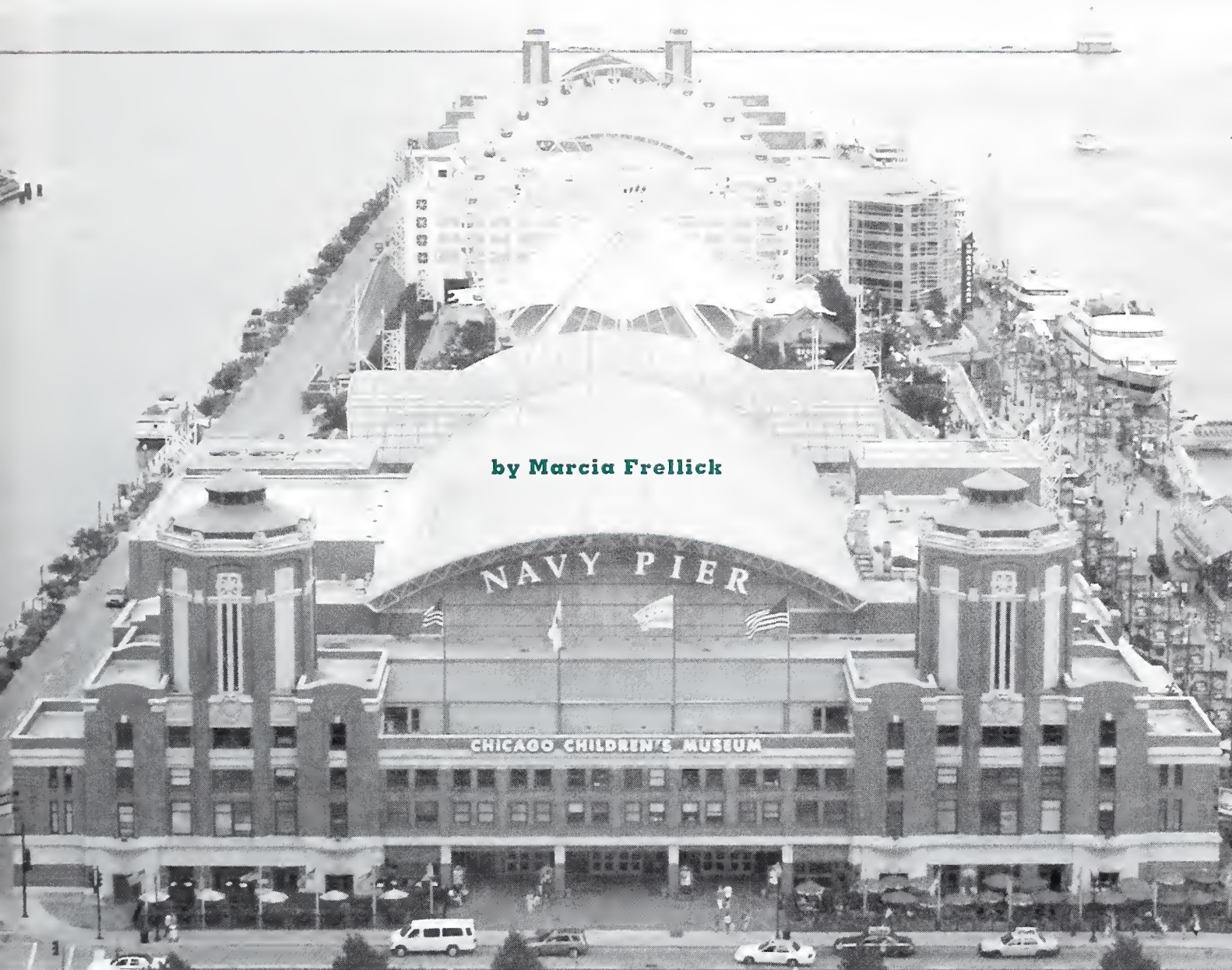
Beverly Scobell



**Updates
to listings in the
2011 Roster
of State
Government Officials
are available at
the Illinois Issues
website:
<http://illinoisissues.uis.edu>**

Welcome visitors

Illinois' tourism industry means big business



by Marcia Frellick

Chicago's Navy Pier draws more than 8 million visitors a year, making it the state's No. 1 tourist attraction.

On any given summer day, 46,000 people fan out over Navy Pier in Chicago to ride the 150-foot Ferris wheel, feel the wind rush off a 45-mph speedboat, play 18 holes of mini-golf, see a Shakespeare play, savor a sugary bag of cinnamon almonds and maybe even end the day with a fireworks show.

It's all big fun for tourists at Illinois' No. 1 attraction and at hundreds of attractions across the state.

But for the state of Illinois, it's big business — \$27 billion worth of business every year spent when someone visits an

attraction, buys souvenirs or spends money on gas, hotel or food. The industry also supports about 300,000 jobs in the state — or one of every 10 — and contributes 13 percent of the state's total sales tax, according to the Illinois Office of Tourism.

Midwest travelers are the biggest contributors to Illinois tourism, especially as family budgets tighten and travelers look for vacation destinations that don't require buying plane tickets, measuring baggage and standing sock-footed in long security lines.

About 85 percent of tourist traffic in the state comes from people driving, says Jan Kostner, deputy director of the Illinois tourism office. With that in mind, the bureau heavily promotes get-away weekends to destinations such as Galena or Starved Rock State Park, Springfield or Shawnee National Forest.

"We're not a two-week vacation state, we are a three- or four-day, long-weekend state," Kostner says.

Enticing international travelers, who stay longer and spend more while they are here, is another focus. The state is beefing up efforts in the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada and China to get tourists to put Illinois at the top of their travel lists as an alternative to New York, California and Florida. In 2009, the latest year for which tourism numbers are available, Illinois had 1.7 million international visitors.

Marketing efforts and news events have helped raise Illinois' profile overseas. The state got international exposure, for instance, in January, when China's president, Hu Jintao, made his first visit to Chicago, the only city outside Washington, D.C., on his U.S. itinerary.

Chicago's 2016 Olympic bid also got international travelers thinking about what the city and state had to offer.

"They know about us through business, with the University of Chicago, etc., but what they don't know about is the tourism side," says Kostner. The tourism bureau is investing in marketing campaigns and partnerships with tourism operators and airlines to boost the state's profile.

"We want them to know that you don't have to go anywhere else," Kostner says. "You'll get the big bustling experience of

Chicago and also the charm of Route 66, which is still huge internationally."

China, in particular, has been an important partner for Chicago. The city participated in the Shanghai World Expo last year as part of the USA Pavilion, which gave the city prime exposure.

Evidence of the popularity of Chicago for Chinese tourists shows up on signs, brochures and guides offered in Mandarin, the primary Chinese dialect, at major attractions. Wendella boat cruises' website has a Mandarin section; the Field Museum offers a map in Mandarin.

The Chicago Office of Tourism and Culture has three downloadable MP3 tours — Chicago Blues, Millennium Park and Kids Chicago — and Mandarin is one of the five languages offered.

"For the blues tour, Mandarin is the most downloaded version by far after English," says Dorothy Coyle, executive director of the Chicago tourism office.

Chicago attracts more than 40 million visitors annually, Coyle says, and the economic impact of tourism in the city is \$10.2 billion.

Between 2003 and 2008, Chicago saw a 47 percent increase in leisure travel when the national average was 6 percent, Coyle says, attributing that largely to the opening of Millennium Park in 2004, along with a boost in marketing and the restaurant scene in Chicago receiving increasing global acclaim.

Now, as the state pulls out of recession, Coyle says she expects people who have put off traveling to start making plans. "We're in a recovery period," she says.



1. Travel spending in Illinois in 2009 generated nearly \$5.1 billion for federal, state and local governments. These additional taxes save an average Illinois household more than \$1,000 in taxes each year, according to the Illinois Office of Tourism.
2. Cahokia Mounds near Collinsville is the only World Heritage site in Illinois, and it is the largest prehistoric city in North America. It was larger than London was in AD 1250.
3. The Lincoln library is the most-attended presidential library and museum in the country.
4. On average, leisure visitors to Illinois spent \$106 per person per day. The total spent daily on average in Illinois businesses is \$74 million.
5. The average age of Illinois' domestic leisure visitor was 46; the majority are married, and they have an average household income of \$83,386.

Sources: Dave Blanchette, <http://cahokiamounds.org>, Office of Tourism and Travel Industries and International Trade Administration



Visitors walk down the south side of 3,300-foot Navy Pier.

Chicago's most popular attractions: (2009 attendance)

Navy Pier	8,050,000
Millennium Park	4,000,000
Lincoln Park Zoo	3,000,000
John G. Shedd Aquarium	1,964,791
Art Institute of Chicago	1,846,889
Museum of Science and Industry	1,605,020
The Field Museum	1,325,007
Willis Tower	1,265,046

<http://www.explorechicago.org/etc>

With the price of gas escalating, Chicago offers a host of low-cost transportation options once visitors arrive. She pointed out that Chicago is on the Megabus route, which offers fares as low as \$1 from several major cities.

With its mass transit options and free or low-cost festivals, the area is in a good position to attract people who are ready to travel but looking for bargains once they get to the city, Coyle says.

Historic sites also offer lower-cost vacation options and Illinois' well-known presidential ties — to Lincoln, Grant, Reagan and Obama — are making these sites destinations as well as side trips.

"Tourism is arguably the second-largest industry in Illinois — second only to agriculture — and heritage tourism is a big part of the tourism industry," says Dave Blanchette, communications manager for the Illinois Historic Preservation Society.

He says Illinois' historic sites — not including the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum — get between 2 million and 3 million visits a year, and the Lincoln museum averages 400,000 per year.

Historic sites can have a tremendous impact on an area's economy. Take the Lincoln museum's impact on Springfield: "You look at downtown development since 2005 when the museum opened. A lot more businesses have opened, and they are the type that cater to tourists — restaurants and shops. Hotels and motels have seen increased business.

"Springfield always was a tourism destination — people came here because we have more Lincoln sites than anyone else in the country," Blanchette says. "What the library did was give people one more reason to visit. The museum attracts 400,000 additional people per year, on average, who probably wouldn't have come to Springfield otherwise. You've got that many more people spending time and money here and possibly staying a day longer."

Photograph courtesy of wikipedia



The Jay Pritzker Pavilion is in the heart of Chicago's Millennium Park, which draws more than 4 million visitors a year.



The Chicago Botanic Garden is located 20 miles north of Chicago.

Lincoln's tomb is one of the tourism draws to the city of Springfield.

Mary Prisco of Piedmont, Calif., was one of the people who has rediscovered Springfield. She and her family had intended to join her parents from Sugar Grove, Ill., over Thanksgiving last year to soak up some history at the first place she thought of for a historic vacation — Williamsburg, Va. Her parents suggested they try the Lincoln museum instead, and a visit there changed her mind about Illinois' historical offerings. Now she thinks of central Illinois as not just the home of her alma mater, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, but as a tourist destination.

"It never occurred to me there would be such an amazing museum in the middle of Illinois," she says.

State parks and natural areas also help bring people to the state, but not always for the reasons you might think.

In southern Illinois, a vacation in a natural area doesn't always mean camping, hiking, birdwatching and canteens.

Sometimes, a nature lover just wants a good glass of wine.

In the middle of the Shawnee National Forest, the Shawnee Hills Wine Trail lets tourists explore 12 wineries in the state's first region to be acknowledged for its wine-making qualities.

The Shawnee trail and smaller wine trails have become the main attraction in the area.

"The wineries do very well here because of the hilly terrain — what you might not expect to see in Illinois," says Cindy Benefield-Cain, executive director of the Southernmost Illinois Tourism Bureau.

Elsewhere, throughout the state, 45 million people visit 324 state parks, fish and wildlife areas, forests, trails and recreational sites, bringing in nearly \$1 billion in revenue. The state parks support close to 8,500 jobs.

At Illinois' most popular state park, Starved Rock, marketing director Kathy Casstevens says the uncertain economy has meant that more people are seeking out lower-cost options and are staying closer to home.

More than 2 million people visited the park in 2010, and Casstevens is expecting a boost in attendance this year as the park celebrates its 100th anniversary.

Anniversaries give tourists an added reason for a visit and some urgency in trying an area of the state they might have otherwise bypassed.

This year, Illinois will trumpet its Civil War connections as the U.S. marks 150 years since the beginning of the war and Lincoln's inauguration. Though there were no Civil War battles in the state, attractions such as Ulysses S. Grant's home in Galena, the Lincoln museum and the Lincoln home in Springfield are expected to be especially popular this year.

Getting the word out about all of these offerings is crucial to Illinois' tourism bureaus. And just like every other department in a state facing a budget deficit of up to \$15 billion, the bureaus are finding ways to stretch resources.

To that end, the free-advertising benefits of social media — Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. — are playing an ever-more-important role, Kostner says.

Chicago is finding success in a scavenger hunt-like game that is bringing in tech-savvy travelers.

"We were the first destination to utilize Foursquare, which is a downloadable game people can play on their smartphones," Coyle says.

It gives people an engaging guide for visiting the city. Players earn one of three badges — "blues," "celery salt" and "on-location" — for checking in at Chicago restaurants, locations and

attractions. Visiting five hot dog locations gets you the celery salt badge. Visiting five film locations and five blues clubs wins you the other two.

The game is building buzz in its first year and now has about 30,000 followers, Coyle says. "It's a very effective way to reach a different kind of audience that is very savvy with technology. ... It also gets to our goal of getting people to visit neighborhoods because many of these sites are located in the neighborhoods."

The tourism office is also working on a smartphone app that will allow tourists to plan and share their travel plans on Facebook and Twitter but also will allow people traveling to a particular destination to search by their particular interests to see what other sites, restaurants and hotels are nearby.

That app should be available this summer. The hope is that tourists who already had a destination in mind will discover another point of interest and extend their stay.

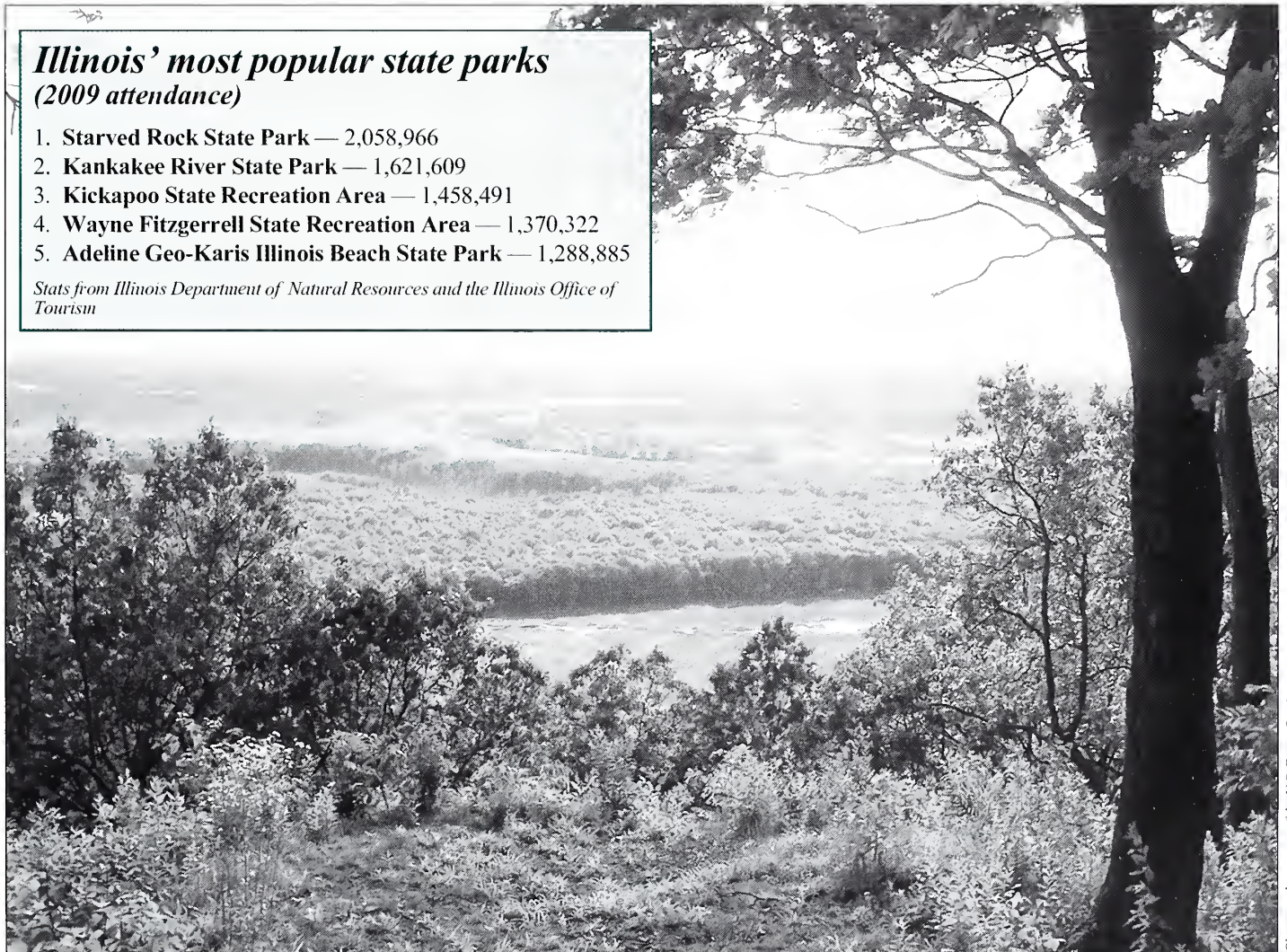
Getting people to Illinois attractions is one part of the tourism push; keeping them in the state a little longer is another. Kostner says extending a stay can be crucial in an industry where even an hour added onto a trip can mean big returns. □

Marcia Frellick is a Chicago-based free-lance writer.

Illinois' most popular state parks (2009 attendance)

1. **Starved Rock State Park** — 2,058,966
2. **Kankakee River State Park** — 1,621,609
3. **Kickapoo State Recreation Area** — 1,458,491
4. **Wayne Fitzgerald State Recreation Area** — 1,370,322
5. **Adeline Geo-Karis Illinois Beach State Park** — 1,288,885

Stats from Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the Illinois Office of Tourism



LaRue-Pine Hills is an area in the Shawnee National Forest with 150-foot limestone bluffs. More than 500 wildlife species can be found within the forest, according to the U.S. Forest Service. Federal sites such as this one are tourist draws, as well as state parks.

Photograph courtesy of the U.S. Forest Service

Set up to fail?

Sweeping changes are proposed for No Child Left Behind

by Jamey Dunn

Every student in America proficient in reading and math skills by 2014.

It's a laudable goal, but educators, reformers and politicians alike say it has set the country's schools up for failure and may be depriving children of a well-rounded education.

As Illinois and other states watch more schools fail under the standards set by the No Child Left Behind Act than state boards of education can assist, President Barack Obama is calling for sweeping changes to the law, also known as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), before most students return to school next fall.

"According to new estimates, under the system No Child Left Behind put in place, more than 80 percent of our schools may be labeled as failing — 80 percent of our schools! Four out of five schools will be labeled as failing. That's an astonishing number. And our impulse is to either be outraged that the numbers are so high or skeptical that they're even true. And let's face it, skepticism is somewhat justified. We know that four out of five schools in this country aren't failing. So what we're doing to measure success and failure is out of line," Obama said during a recent speech at a Virginia middle school.

In Illinois, 720 schools are on the State Board of Education's academic watch list for schools failing to meet the standards required by the act. However, several of those same schools are on the board's "honor roll" for high performance or for

consistently improving student performance in recent years. This illustrates the primary complaint most have about the rigid standards set under former President George W. Bush: Schools that show substantial improvement are still dubbed as failing.

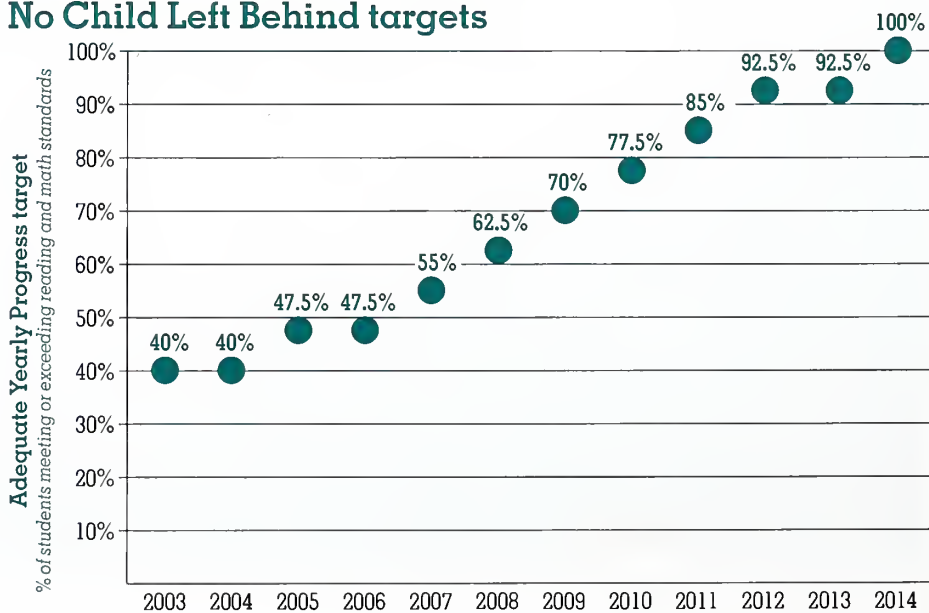
"No one likes how NCLB labels schools as failures, even when they're making real gains," says U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.

In 2010, NCLB standards ramped up and required that 77.5 percent of students at a school meet or exceed expectations in reading and math skills measured by a standardized test, that high schools have a graduation rate of 80 percent and that ele-

mentary and middle schools have an attendance rate of 90 percent. Also in 2010, more than half of Illinois' public schools — or almost 2,000 — failed to reach the targets, referred to as Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), set out by the federal program. More than 550 school districts — more than 60 percent — failed to make AYP. The requirements are set to continue to increase until 2014, when the goal is 100 percent of students passing the test.

"That's never going to happen," says U.S. Rep. Judy Biggert, an Illinois Republican. Biggert, who serves on the U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce, echoes the opinions of many who say that the goals built into the act are

No Child Left Behind targets



Source: Illinois State Board of Education

arbitrary and that scores from a test administered once a year cannot fully reflect how students are progressing. "That one test should not gauge how kids are increasing their performance."

Schools and districts that do not meet AYP for two consecutive years face federal sanctions, including mandates to offer children additional education services provided by an outside contractor, to give parents the choice to place their children at another school, and to create and adhere to an improvement plan. Schools that continue to miss the mark face restructuring, which can include removal of some administrative staff and teachers. They also face potential state sanctions, including a takeover by the State Board of Education, if they land on the state's academic watch list for more than three consecutive years.

However, as more schools become eligible for such consequences, in practice, many of them never occur. While schools are required to offer "school choice" to parents after failing to make AYP for two consecutive years — and must continue to offer it until they make AYP two years in a row — options are limited by the availability of other schools in the area and whether they have room for more students.

According to the U.S. Department of Education, 51,713 children were eligible to move out of their failing schools in the 2008-2009 school year, but only 633 students actually swapped schools. "In certain areas, there just aren't good choices, and



U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and President Barack Obama speak at a Virginia middle school about a proposal to update the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

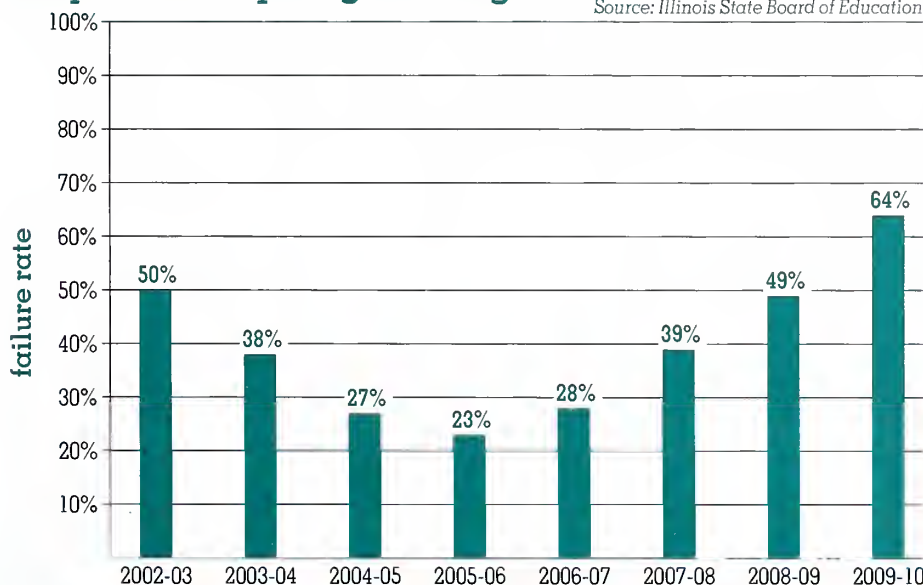
that is the travesty. ... Just saying that a child can transfer doesn't mean that a child can," says Jonah Edelman, chief executive officer of the national education reform group Stand For Children. The organization's Illinois affiliate spearheaded the recent push for education reform in the state. The statistics for schools that use outside education services were better, but still, fewer than a quarter of students eligible for the services received them.

An April audit of the Illinois State Board of Education found that the board is leaving schools to languish on the academic watch list without providing the intervention required by law. At the end of the 2008-2009 school year, 411 schools had been on the list for four to eight years. By the end of the 2009-2010 school year, the number had grown to 471 schools and 42 school districts. The report said board officials told auditors that they had not intervened because they lacked resources. "Not taking appropriate action against schools placed on the academic watch list may result in the continued underperformance of those Illinois schools and is in noncompliance with state law," the audit states.

While state law requires the Illinois Board of Education to step in and assist underperforming schools, the board uses federal standards to determine which make the watch list. "Any kind of state takeover or intervention is expensive, and we don't have the staff and funding to do all of these, especially given the fact that as NCLB is currently written, all Illinois schools will eventually be in this status. We are taking on major interventions in North Chicago and East St. Louis," board spokeswoman Mary Fergus said in a written statement. The board has voiced interest in changing the law so it can target a

Illinois school districts failing to meet Adequate Yearly Progress target

Source: Illinois State Board of Education



smaller number of schools and focus on those with chronic problems.

Obama is also pushing for a more targeted approach. “We need a better way of figuring out which schools are deeply in trouble, which schools aren’t, and how we get not only the schools that are in really bad shape on track, how do we help provide the tools to schools that want to get even better to get better,” he said.

He and many others working on the issue want to change the law so that schools are graded by individual student improvement. Instead of trying to make all kids reach a certain test score, each individual student’s progress over time would be tracked. If kids improved enough from year to year, schools would then be viewed as successful. “What’s been accepted is that what we need to do is focus on the child,” Biggert says.

Obama’s plan still includes consequences for schools that have not made progress, which Duncan says number about 5,000 across the country. A school in this category would be required to pick from four restructuring models that include measures such as removing the school principal and some staff, reopening as a charter school or closing altogether.

The president’s proposal would no longer require schools to offer supplemental education services or school choice. Obama does want to create more options for parents by encouraging the growth of sometimes-controversial magnet and charter alternative schools.

Sandy Kress, who helped create NCLB under the Bush administration, agrees it needs some reworking. But he says Obama wants to remove the teeth of the law that force schools to reach underperforming students. “Today, if schools shortchange students, especially subgroups of disadvantaged students, improvement in the operation of the school is required. Student problems can no longer be swept under the rug,” Kress wrote in an opinion piece for the *New York Daily News*. “Under the framework being proposed for the reform of the law, the administration would require that unless a school is among the very worst in the nation, it would no longer be required to improve, even if it continues to fail its black, Hispanic and other disadvantaged kids.”

Republican state Rep. Roger Eddy, superintendent of Hutsonville Community

“No one likes how NCLB labels schools as failures, even when they’re making real gains.”

– U.S. Secretary of Education

Arne Duncan

Unit School District 1, says while it is important to have high expectations for all students, children come into schools with varying home circumstances, backgrounds and capacities to learn. Eddy says the job of educators is to help each student realize his or her full potential, and the best way to measure that is by tracking student growth. Both he and Edelman agree that one positive effect of NCLB was that it drew attention to the need to close the racial and economic achievement gaps in the public education system by tracking the performance of several demographic subgroups. Edelman says he hopes to see that continue under a rewrite of the law. He adds that the collection of those statistics keeps schools from being able to “mask underperformance of children of color or children with disabilities.”

Eddy says it does not make sense to administer the same tests given in standard classrooms to special education students who have been diverted to a separate curriculum track that meets their needs. “They have an individualized education plan that’s different from all the other kids in third grade — let’s say — because that’s why they’re in special education. They’re taken out of the classroom. In many cases, those kids are given the same test as their third-grade peers,” Eddy says. “Then what we’re doing is that we’re teaching them based on an [individual education plan] and testing them on the very curriculum we took them out of because modifications were necessary.”

NCLB’s critics say its emphasis on math and reading sometimes results in other subjects receiving less attention in the classroom because teachers try to ensure that their students pass the test. They say that often leaves graduating seniors unprepared for college and the workforce. Eddy says many schools recognize this and are

to some degree ignoring the NCLB standards. “I think schools, by and large, have reached a point that they’re doing maybe not what’s best to meet the goals of NCLB, but [what’s best] for their kids now,” he says.

Eddy holds up the example of the high school in his district that has failed to make AYP in math. He says instead of pushing kids into remedial math classes to make sure they passed the test, the school began offering welding classes to prepare interested students for a trade. “Kids that I’m pretty certain would have dropped out of school — they wouldn’t have probably passed the math portion of the test — they’re in school,” he says. “At 17, those kids would have said: ‘No we’re not going to go into that remedial math class. We’re going to just [drop out.]’”

Educators and lawmakers have been raising red flags for years about the goals of NCLB that they see as unrealistic, but a meaningful rewrite of the law has yet to materialize. In 2009, members of Congress considered some of the changes on the table today, in particular switching to a student-growth-based model of evaluation. (For more information on these efforts see *Illinois Issues*, September 2009, page 15.) Biggert says negotiations between stakeholders fell apart that time around. She says since then, some of the obstacles to negotiations have been removed, and she is optimistic that many of the problems with the law will be addressed. “We’re working on the reauthorization [of ESEA] now. We are having hearings.”

Biggert does not agree with all the pieces of Obama’s proposal. She says the four restructuring options for the lowest performing schools are too prescriptive, and she would like to see more flexibility for solving problems at the local and state level. “All of them — really, I think — restrict innovation and create a lot more red tape.” Biggert says one of the flaws of NCLB is that it created such federal mandates on local districts. “We don’t want to be the national school board, and nobody wants us to.” However, she is hopeful that a compromise can be worked out and says many in Congress share the president’s goal of a rewrite by next fall. “I think that we’d like to, too. We’ve waited now a couple years for the reauthorization. We’ve lost a lot of creativity and innovation in the schools that way.” □

Risky borrowing

Local governments face difficulties
in refinancing bonds

by Chris Wetterich



The Great Recession was caused in part by overextended homebuyers who took out loans to purchase homes that cost more than they could afford. They were enticed by banks offering low or no down payments, coupled with interest rates that were low at first but could rocket up later. The housing market collapsed when those interest rates were ratcheted up, and homeowners could no longer afford their mortgage payments. Some were able to refinance, but many others walked away.

A similar problem faces states, cities, counties, other types of local governments and other public borrowers that have tapped into the municipal bond market to fund projects and other spending using variable interest rates and a guarantee by a third-party “liquidity enhancer,” usually banks. In Illinois, officials have no idea of the scope of the problem, although state government itself is not currently ensnared in any variable interest rate borrowing. The problem seems to be limited to local governments and so-called conduit borrowers — public entities, such as local hospitals, that borrow money using municipal bonds because of the tax-exempt status of the interest earned by lenders.

Meanwhile, state government hopes that its financial troubles, which continue despite a 67 percent income tax increase passed in January, will not include difficulty borrowing on the municipal bond market, particularly if the legislature eventually approves some sort of borrow-

ing plan. The state is expected to have \$8 billion in unpaid obligations at the end of Fiscal Year 2011, according to Illinois Comptroller Judy Baar Topinka.

Typically, when a local government sells bonds for a project, a new bridge for example, it borrows the money at fixed interest rates for a long period, often 20 to 30 years. Sometimes, the bonds are paid off with a set revenue source. In the bridge example, motorists pay tolls when they cross. Other times, cities can sell general obligation bonds backed by everyday tax revenues, such as property or sales taxes.

In the mid-2000s, before the 2008 crash, a significant number of local governments and conduit issuers sold long-term bonds that were repriced weekly, says John Sinsheimer, director of capital markets for the state of Illinois.

“You could call it a bit of alchemy,” Sinsheimer says, “because instead of paying for 20-year money at a 20-year rate, they paid for 20-year at a one-week rate. In order to do that, the bondholders wanted to know: ‘Well, if I’m going to buy this paper, I’m not interested in getting a one-week rate for 20 years. I want to know I can sell it at any time.’ So the papers that were done like this — the bonds — were always backed by a series of legal commitments from third parties. ... Normally, these were called liquidity enhancements.”

In a liquidity enhancement, a bank would provide letters of credit that guaranteed the deals in exchange for a fee. But

now, the banks that provided the liquidity enhancements have lost their bond ratings or aren’t capable of offering the kind of credit support they did during the last decade, Sinsheimer says. Most of the deals were for between five and seven years.

“In other words, it’s a 20-year bond, but the liquidity enhancer said, ‘I’ll be here for five years,’” Sinsheimer says.

Such deals are a small chunk of the \$3 trillion municipal bond market. An estimated \$80 million to \$100 million in variable rate, short-term notes are out there that need to be refinanced from bank-loan agreements, says Richard Ciccarone, managing director and chief research officer at McDonnell Investment Management in Oak Brook.

Sinsheimer describes the problem as potentially significant. For instance, nearly \$125 million in variable-rate bonds used to finance part of the Reliant Stadium in Houston, Texas, are due in 2014 instead of 2030, according to the *Houston Chronicle*.

“Depending on the agreement with the liquidity enhancer, many of these deals came with what’s called a term-out. If you don’t replace the liquidity enhancer, the bonds automatically start to repay faster than you otherwise would have expected them to,” Sinsheimer says.

“The best example I could give you for purposes of trying to make this understandable,” he continued, “would be that if you took out a 30-year mortgage on your house and you got a floating rate on

it. Your local bank agreed that if, for whatever reason, the holder of the paper wanted to sell it, they could, and now your local bank is no longer there, and you're forced to refinance your mortgage at today's rates, which may be higher than what you could have done when you bought the house five years ago."

The severity of the problem in Illinois is unclear, but the solution is obvious, while also potentially expensive. Few banks are willing to enter into these types of arrangements, and for those that do, the charge has skyrocketed. Some banks used to provide such backing for as little of 0.001 percent of the total amount of money to be raised by the bonds. Now, the price is as much as 1.25 percent, Sinsheimer says.

"The solution for either the municipal or the conduit issuer is to refinance the paper at a fixed rate. Rates may be higher today than they were. It may cost them more. If they can get a liquidity enhancement put in place, it may cost them a lot more than what they did before," Sinsheimer says.

"Yes, there is an issue. The market is aware of it. The bankers are aware of it, and the result will be that many of the

issuers will be forced to do something. You could see some municipalities — and this is nationwide, this is not just Illinois — you could see some issuers get into financial stress."

Ciccarone believes one major seller of such bonds is the city of Chicago. City finance officials did not return telephone calls seeking comment for this article.

"I don't know whether it's this year or not, but they do have that paper outstanding. I know the city has had a lot of variable rates outstanding," Ciccarone says.

Problems with such financing probably will not be evident until they blow up, Ciccarone says.

"The concern about the refinancing risk seems to have cooled, but it is still there," Ciccarone says. "We're always waiting to see if there's something behind the scenes. The problem is a lot of these renegotiations ... are not very public. And so the market doesn't have a lot of advance information on if they're going badly.

"To date, most of these refinancings have been getting done nationally. And I know of no reason to believe, even in Illinois, they're not getting done."

It will be up to individual public borrowers and their governing boards to

determine the scope of the problem, Sinsheimer says. The state is not monitoring the situation.

"We'd have to look at every bond that was issued by all of them — remember, these bonds could be issued by everything from your water reclamation to your school districts to your local municipalities — we'd have to look at every bond that was issued and try and analyze whether or not they were floaters, fixed, did they have a liquidity enhancer, when did that expire?" Sinsheimer says. "It's something that needs to be done at the local level. ... There are no two bonds that would be the same."

Illinois state government does not have any variable-rate bonds backed by bank notes, but it may again seek access to the municipal bond market this summer if the legislature approves billions in borrowing that Gov. Pat Quinn and legislative Democrats want to catch up on payments the state owes service providers and local governments. Quinn proposed borrowing nearly \$9 billion in his state-of-the-state address earlier this year.

Approval of such borrowing will necessitate the agreement of at least a few Republicans because a three-fifths majority is required in each legislative chamber. As of mid-May, Republicans have balked at what Quinn has pitched as refinancing money the state already owes.

There are differing opinions as to what attitude bond buyers will have toward the state's seeking again to borrow money to pay what were essentially day-to-day operating expenses.

Sinsheimer points to the successful deal in February to sell \$3.7 billion in bonds to make the state's Fiscal Year 2011 pension payment. The income-tax increase smoothed the waters for that deal and will probably be a positive factor if the state goes to the markets again, he says. The state had \$6.2 billion worth of bids for the \$3.7 billion in bonds, which helped push down the interest rate charged to the state to borrow the money.

Investors who bought those bonds have not traded them at a high rate, and the interest rates in the post-bond sale market have not dramatically changed, Sinsheimer says. In that market, the interest rates on bonds that were set to



mature in seven years dropped by about 50 basis points, or one-half of 1 percent.

"If there's not a lot of volume, that says the buyers are very comfortable with the credit. They're very comfortable with the pricing on the bonds, and they want to hold them for a while. And that's good," Sinsheimer says.

"The tax increase has dramatically altered the view of the market on the state's credit. The tax increase does not permanently fix the problems the state is facing. The tax increase gives us four years of stable fiscal platform, fiscal performance, during which time we now need to go back and change the way we spend our money."

Another way to measure the health of bonds is the price of insurance to guard against their defaulting — a financial instrument known as a credit-default swap. The cost of a credit-default swap for Illinois bonds has steadily fallen since the tax increase was enacted in January.

The high point for an Illinois credit-default swap so far this year was 360 basis points on January 6, according to Markit Intraday, a firm that prices such financial instruments. That means it would cost \$360,000 to insure \$10 million of Illinois debt over 10 years. On April 19, an Illinois credit-default swap was down to 232 basis points.

"I attribute that to two reasons," says Otis Casey III, Markit's director of credit research. "First, the tax increases enacted by Illinois demonstrated significant political resolve to address credit concerns. Overall, municipal credits have tightened since the early part of the year as municipal issuers have balked at paying elevated yields [interest rates] and thus withheld new issuance. That said, investors seem concerned that spreads could widen out again if tested with significant new issuance."

But the price of credit-default swaps for Illinois is significantly higher than for all other major public borrowers. A credit-default swap for New York City stood at 149 basis points, New Jersey was 157 basis points, Florida was 105 points and Virginia was at 75 points. Even California was at 218 points on April 19.

The state's financial condition also has an impact on the ability of local governments to borrow. Decatur City Manager Ryan McCrady says analysts with

Moody's Investors Service were concerned about how much money the state owed the city when Decatur went for an \$41.7 million bond issue in October.

"They asked us on our outstanding revenue ... how much assurance we had that we would actually collect on those. They want to know how far the state's behind and those kind of things," McCrady says. "The money that was owed to the city was for the most part income tax receipts, which are laid out by state statute and have to be paid. So there was a reasonable assurance to Moody's that we were going to get that money eventually."

Ciccarone says there is something to be said for a state in as bad financial shape as Illinois still being able to borrow. But he noted that a significant number of those who bought Illinois' pension bonds were foreign sources, and the costs were significant. About \$520 million of the \$6.2 billion in bids were from overseas buyers.

"They did get market access. They got it at 200 basis [2 percentage] points higher than the others might have paid.

They were 100 [basis points] higher than other states and 200 higher than treasuries," Ciccarone says.

"It was helped out by the fact that they went with a taxable bond market issuance. And, therefore, it went to some nontraditional municipal investors, including foreign investors. If they issued that as tax-free alone, I'm not sure how well that would have done. It may not have done as well. ... You have market access until you don't have market access.

"They're expecting that it will go because they were able to get that deal done a couple months ago. However, it's not a forecast for clear skies. There's going to be some turbulence in the air to do that type of financing, even some home-grown turbulence. There's a question mark as to whether this is prudent management to do another \$9 billion of operating expense borrowing to put it out there long term." □

Chris Wetterich covers state government and politics for the Springfield State Journal-Register and GateHouse News Service.

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Campus killers

Perpetrators of mass murders at universities had serious mental illnesses but not criminal records

by Debra Chandler Landis

It's rare when college campuses are the scenes of horrific mass murders, such as those at Northern Illinois University and Virginia Tech, according to scientific studies of crime and violence. It's also rare when people suffering from mental illness commit such crimes. But the young men perpetrating these mass murders suffered from severe mental health problems, including major depressive disorder, and had relatively easy access to guns.

They didn't, however, have criminal records.

Still, in the wake of the Northern Illinois and Virginia Tech tragedies — and under legislative directive to improve campus safety — Illinois universities and their counterparts across the United States have incorporated criminal background questions into their college applications. Some also inquire about disciplinary problems or suspensions at other schools. According to a 2009 study by the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, 7 percent of colleges and universities perform criminal background checks on all applicants. Sixty-four percent require applicants to self-disclose any criminal history they may have.

"We're not trying to deny college admission. We're just looking to keep our campuses as safe as possible," says Todd Sigler, director of the police department at Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

It's uncertain exactly how many universities and colleges in Illinois ask about criminal convictions more serious than minor

traffic offenses. John Jones of Northern Illinois University believes most, if not all, public and private universities in Illinois do.

"Northern began using criminal background checks in fall 2009. Housing [at Northern] asked about criminal backgrounds before then on housing applications. We felt as if we were behind in not asking these questions," says Jones, Northern's associate vice president for student affairs.

The practice is counter-intuitive to reducing recidivism, says Bobbi Norman, senior program administrator at Tower of Refuge, a Springfield-based grassroots organization working to reduce the rate of recidivism in Illinois. The state has a 51.7 percent recidivism rate, fifth-highest among 41 states providing data for a Pew Center study released in April. It was 51.4 percent in 2009.

"College classes are offered in prison. We tell our clients: 'Get more education. Get more training.' I think a finger is being pointed, a condemning finger, that says, 'You have done your time, but you are not valued,'" Norman says. "The people [at Northern and Virginia Tech] didn't have criminal records. They were mentally ill."

An Illinois law that took effect in 2009 directed campuses to implement violence-prevention plans, including campus safety committees and emergency alert procedures. While the law didn't specifically mandate asking college applicants questions about their criminal backgrounds, many universities began doing so.

Student views

A survey of more than 5,000 students across six Illinois college campuses found, among other things, that students:

- Believed applicants with multiple criminal convictions should be denied admission to school, and those not affiliated with an institution should be restricted from accessing the campus.
- Did not support allowing the concealed carry of firearms on their campus,

particularly by their fellow students.

- Believed they could protect themselves from a crime-related incident.
- Were modestly confident in the ability of faculty and staff to recognize dangerous students and to act appropriately in the event of a campus-based critical incident.
- Were satisfied with the performance, visibility, and overall quality of the public safety office on their campuses.

Source: June 2010 report, *Student Perceptions of Campus Safety Initiatives: Assessing Views of Critical Incident Prevention and Response*, by George Burruss, Joseph Schafer and Matthew Giblin of the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Southern Illinois University Carbondale. Prepared for the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority.



An impromptu memorial was created at Northern Illinois University in 2008 after the murder of five students.

Applications typically ask potential students whether they have been convicted of anything more serious than a minor traffic offense, and if so, to explain the incident, when it occurred and what they learned as a result.

Some Illinois universities may ask college applicants who “self-disclose” to agree to a full criminal background check, including a review of court records and police reports by admissions staff, campus police and other personnel. On average, about a dozen applicants to Southern Illinois University Carbonale each year say they have been convicted of a crime, and about half are denied admission, according to SIUC spokesman Rod Sievers.

Since implementing background-check questions in October 2009, Eastern Illinois University has “received 12 complete applications from prospective students indicating they have been charged with or convicted of a felony crime,” says Brenda Major, director of admissions. “One was denied admission. Some were admitted but restricted to online courses. Some were required to meet with the director of the Office of Student Standards. The director of admissions and the provost review the files, including official court documents. We consider whether this individual presents a danger or threat to himself [or herself] or to the university community.”

At Benedictine University — a private institution with campuses in Bellwood, Tinley Park, Naperville, Bolingbrook, Rockford and Springfield — answering “yes” to having a criminal conviction does “not constitute an automatic bar to admission. Factors such as date of the offense, seriousness, and nature of the violation and rehabilitation will be taken into consideration,” according to a Benedictine college application.

Some universities also want to know about disciplinary violations that occurred during a prospective student’s high school years. Northwestern University, for instance, asks: “Have you ever been found responsible for a disciplinary violation at any educa-

tional institution you have attended from 9th grade (or the international equivalent) forward, whether related to academic misconduct or behavioral misconduct, that resulted in your probation, suspension, removal, dismissal, or expulsion from the institution?”

“Seventy-five percent of schools consider any drug or alcohol conviction negatively, despite how common these offenses are among college-age population,” Marcia Weissman writes in *Inside Higher Ed*, an online publication. “One-third of schools consider pending misdemeanors, or even misdemeanor arrests, in a negative light.” Weissman is the executive director of the Center for Community Alternatives, a New York-based organization that describes its mission as promoting “reintegrative justice and a reduced reliance on incarceration through advocacy, services and public policy development in pursuit of civil and human rights.”

There are public policy reasons to rethink the collection of criminal history information from college applicants, say advocates for ex-offenders.

Illinois prisons hold more than 45,000 inmates, with the cost to house one inmate averaging about \$27,000 a year and the state’s corrections budget totaling about \$1 billion. Education is identified as a key component to reducing the likelihood of people violating probation or parole and returning to prison. Many ex-offenders committed nonviolent offenses, Norman says.

There’s also a question of racial bias.

“The fact that African-Americans and Latinos are overrepresented in the criminal justice population is no longer open to question. Racial profiling and the heavy concentration of police in low-income, urban neighborhoods have led to high rates of arrest, prosecution and conviction among communities of color,” Weissman writes.

Latinos and African-Americans are more likely than whites to be arrested for marijuana possession, a misdemeanor, she says. “Yet government studies show that whites use marijuana more

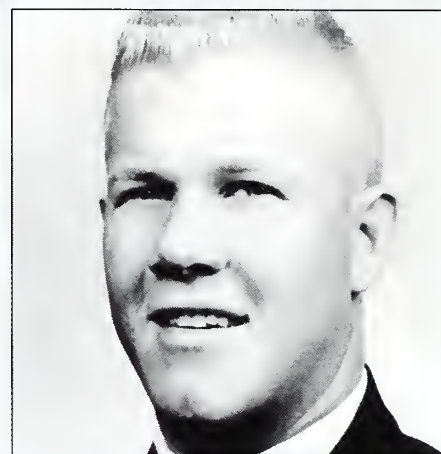
Three of the country's most deadly campus shootings



Feb. 14, 2008: **Steven Kazmierczak**, a graduate student in social work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and former honors student in criminal justice at Northern Illinois University, shot and killed five people and injured 21 others at Northern before killing himself. Kazmierczak, said to have suffered from severe depression and anxiety, reportedly had stopped taking his medications.



April 16, 2007: **Cho Seung-Hui**, a senior English student at Virginia Tech who had been treated as a teenager for major depressive disorder and selective mutism — described as severe anxiety that inhibits one's ability to speak in front of others — killed 32 people and wounded many others on the Virginia Tech campus before committing suicide.



Aug. 1, 1966: **Charles Joseph Whitman**, a former Marine and student at the University of Texas at Austin, killed his mother and wife and then killed 16 people and wounded 32 others during a shooting rampage on and around the university's campus. He was killed by two police officers. An autopsy revealed that Whitman had an aggressively growing brain tumor.

than either blacks or Latinos. Based on these facts, screening for criminal records cannot be a race-neutral practice."

The deadly shootings at Northern, Virginia Tech and more recently in Tucson understandably raise questions and concerns about how institutes of higher education can prevent crime and what should occur when emergencies happen.

Interestingly, the U.S. Department of Education has concluded that "students on the campuses of post-secondary institutions are significantly safer than the nation as a whole," Weissman writes. "Based on reports submitted to the U.S. Department of Education under the Clery Act, in 2008, there were 11 homicides, 2,418 forcible rapes, 1,390 robberies and 2,078 aggravated assaults reported by 2,677 four-year colleges with a combined enrollment of just over 12 million. Overall, that translates to a rate per 100,000 students that is a small fraction of the corresponding U.S. figure drawn from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports," according to www.thecrimereport.org/archive. The Crime Report is published by the Center on Media, Crime and Justice and Criminal Justice Journalists, a national association.

Sigler, Jones and others in higher education say they consider such things as the nature of the crimes committed, ages of applicants when the crimes were committed and whether applicants' accounts of what occurred correspond with court records. "I don't agree," Jones says of critics who say higher education is contributing to the potential for higher recidivism by denying college admission based on criminal background answers.

While some may argue drug offenses shouldn't be taken into consideration, Sigler says drugs and violence are often intertwined.

Nevertheless, there is "no empirical evidence that students with criminal records present a threat to campus safety."

Weissman writes in *Inside Higher Ed*. "Only one study has investigated the link between criminal history screening and improved safety on campus; no statistical difference in campus crime was found between schools that screen and schools that don't.

"Rape and sexual assault are the only crimes showing no statistical differences between college students and nonstudents, and those offenses are most often committed by inebriated students who have no prior criminal records," she adds.

Furthermore, police reports and other records can be inaccurate or misleading, according to Barnak Nassiran of the American Association of College Registrars and Admissions Officers. Speaking at a conference last summer, Nassiran told colleagues the judicial system should decide whom to isolate and asked rhetorically, "If a person doesn't belong on campus, what are they doing free in our society?"

If higher education institutes believe they must conduct criminal history screenings, they should have "reasonable, fair and written policies and procedures" in place and limit disclosures to felonies committed in the last five years and after an individual's 19th birthday, according to a series of recommendations in a Center for Community Alternatives report titled, *The Use of Criminal History Records in College Admissions Reconsidered*.

Weissman writes that a college education is a crime prevention tool. "Colleges and universities promote public safety in the larger community when they open their doors to people with criminal records who demonstrate the commitment and qualifications to pursue higher education." □

Debra Chandler Landis is a free-lance writer and student publications adviser at the University of Illinois Springfield.

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5-13-11

Food deserts

Health advocates try to help urban residents overcome lack of access to fresh fruits and vegetables

by Lauren N. Johnson

“There are a lot of fast food restaurants; that’s all there is,” says Shawn Jackson, principal of Spencer Elementary Technology Academy in Austin, a community on the west side of Chicago that was labeled a food desert in 2006.

Jackson, an Austin native, says he talks with his 820 students almost every day about the importance of healthy eating and adds that even his administration has shifted to healthier eating habits — though it is not always easy with the limited choices available. “We just started noticing that the default food here is McDonald’s. ... There are no healthy food sources.”

As public health advocates attempt to bring awareness and healthier foods to such areas, they often face the challenges of overcoming residents’ ingrained eating habits, as well as the potentially higher costs associated with healthy foods.

Many areas — most often urban or inner city — where people have little access to affordable, fresh vegetables, fruits, milk, eggs and whole grain products have become known as food deserts. The term is used by health and wellness advocates and socio-economists to describe areas where community members live a mile or more away from a store selling fresh produce.

Instead, those areas have ample access to corner convenience stores that sell sugared drinks and candies and fast food restaurants that primarily sell food containing unhealthy ingredients such as trans-fats. Residents who might seek other retailers, such as grocery stores, often face limited transportation options, as well.

According to a study by the United States Department of Agriculture, about 23.5 million people, including 6.5 million children, lived in food deserts in 2009.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in April released a nationwide progress report on the health environment of states, and Illinois ranked below average when it came to healthy food choices in its communities.

Illinois scored eight out of a possible 100 on the Modified Retail Food Environment Index, which measures healthy food availability in relation to health diseases. No state scored more than 20 on the index, and the average score for states was 10. Mark Peysakhovich, legislative director of the American Heart Association of Illinois, says of the state’s score: “We talk a lot about parents being responsible for kids, and there’s all this talk about individual responsibility, but this report says that our kids are not really healthy. And we are all responsible. We have a price to pay.”

Nutritionists say a high-fat, high-sugar diet lacking in fresh fruits and vegetables is a risk factor for several common health concerns, including poor dental health, heart disease, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer. Barbara Fiese, a professor of human development at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, says limited food access is one of many key contributors to poor health, and that frequently she sees an increase of unhealthy diets in children and adults extending over generations. “We’re seeing big spikes in diabetes in children and cardiovascular

disease in adults at much younger ages,” says Fiese. One out of six children in Illinois, she says, suffers from poor nutrition and lack of access to healthy foods.

In addition to the obesity epidemic that in recent years has gained national attention, Fiese says a poor diet can significantly affect childhood development and cognitive skills, and even cause muscular skeletal disorder. She adds that as a result, a child’s immune system and brain development are compromised. “Some of our kids come hungry — some of our kids don’t eat at all — and then they’re expected to come in and be successful students. And we’re asking them to do this without giving them the proper energy sources,” Jackson says.

The concept of poor nutrition resulting in poor health is not new, but with recent spikes in unemployment and salaries staying stagnant in a struggling economy, some basic needs may fall short of being met, including fresh food.

“I think it’s an indication that some of our safety nets are not working. ... Now paying for food has become a big problem,” Fiese says. She notes that with fewer state and federal resources, programs addressing nutrition are sometimes passed over for funding. And with fewer dollars in many household budgets for inflexible costs such as rent, it’s the grocery list that often gets cut.

Researchers say the burden of dealing with the resulting health conditions falls mainly on government agencies, employers and health professionals through high-

er medical costs and increased need for care.

Mari Gallagher, who owns Chicago-based Mari Gallagher Research and Consulting Group, found disparities in access to healthier food options on the south and west sides of Chicago in her 2006 report *Examining the Impact of Food Deserts on Public Health in Chicago*. It found that more than 500,000 Illinoisans live in areas with little or no access to grocery markets that sell fresh produce. Common traits among these areas are the racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds of residents and the substantial negative impact on their health, experts say. In the report, Gallagher also studied the consequences of poor diet, as well as the idea of a balanced selection of food items, as determining factors linked to public health.

In 2006, 521,488 African-Americans resided across almost 40 percent of Chicago's blocks, and on average, they lived 0.59 miles — or six blocks — away from the nearest grocery store, according to Gallagher. Her research in that same year revealed severe food access problems within a group of Chicago communities, such as Austin, Ashburn, North Lawndale, South Deering and West Englewood.

The report, sponsored by LaSalle Bank, says that in comparison with most of the country's largest metro areas, Chicago has the fewest supermarket chains. That greatly impacts low-income and often predominantly African-American neighborhoods in the city — with single women, chil-

dren, the disabled and elderly being the most vulnerable groups.

While not many statewide studies have been conducted to detect the presence of food deserts in Illinois, poor nutrition and lack of access to healthier foods seem to have no county borders. "You're more likely to run into fast-food restaurants in low-income areas, and that's true in Champaign, as much as it's true in Chicago," Fiese says.

Gallagher agrees food deserts could exist in other places throughout the state — particularly suburban and rural areas — besides those in Chicago. "Unfortunately there are different places that suffer," Gallagher says. "There are many different places, so you really have to analyze the situation place by place to make that determination," says Gallagher.

Retailers seem to determine the climate of food options in many low-income neighborhoods, but community-based groups see other alternatives. "Over time, there's been disinvestment [in low-access communities] because of there's this idea of weak buying power [from lenders]," says Sheelah Muhammad, board secretary and activist at Chicago-based Food Desert Action, a grassroots organization that launched Fresh Moves, a mobile produce market.

The group planned to establish a pilot project in the west Chicago areas of North Lawndale and Austin on May 25. "Oftentimes, there is a misperception that people don't want to eat healthy, but it's all about personal choice," Muhammad

says. "National chains have difficulty finding large parcels of affordable urban land to support their high costs of operation. Independents can't gamble on unproven locations, and ethnic markets are slow to grow," the group's website states.

In April, Food Desert Action took an out-of-commission bus donated by the Chicago Transit Authority and transformed the blue cloth seats into shelves and refrigerators for vegetables and fruits. Since its start, the mobile market has provided affordable, fresh produce every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday. The group plans to engage communities by partnering with health clinics, churches, mosques, other organizations and schools, such as Spencer Elementary.

In addition to efforts by grassroots organizations, federal and state initiatives also help to combat and eliminate food deserts. In January, Chicago Public Schools initiated Breakfast for All, a federally funded program that offers free breakfasts for children, focusing on those from low-income families.

Some state efforts have stalled during the recent budget crunch. The Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity created a program called the Fresh Food Fund through its office of Urban Assistance, as part of the Illinois Jobs Now capital construction legislation in 2009. It would have encouraged grocery retailers to come into urban, low-income communities through a \$10 million grant, but it was placed on hold last year. As of

press time, the future of the program was uncertain. The Illinois Food Marketing Task Force and Illinois Fresh Food Financing Initiative, both established by the state in July 2009, were among the groups involved with the program.

President Barack Obama's administration last year launched a \$400 million Healthy Food Financing Initiative, which plans to place healthy-food retailers in underserved areas nationwide. The initiative coincides with First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move campaign to end childhood obesity. Gallagher says retailers have been a helpful component to the cause. "They don't play the only role, but they do play an important role. Clearly, we need good food choices, which also create healthy competition."

Some say retailers have a long way to go in terms of promoting healthier foods as aggressively as they market their traditional hamburger-and-fries fare. "Increased public awareness [of healthy foods] and demand are slow in coming, but you will get a strong response from fast foods [restaurants] saying, 'We sell salad,'" Fiese says. "It's going to take more than a

village to change all this because it's more complex than just having a sustained and balanced diet. ... It's more than just eating an apple. It's finding that apple."

Common actions being tested by retailers include building grocery markets closer to impoverished neighborhoods or offering produce in existing stores that might otherwise only sell cosmetics, over-the-counter medicine or miscellaneous items. Retailers may have their hands tied to some degree by distributors who determine the selection of food products that stores can buy to offer their customers. Fiese says, "In some ways, the retailers are the middlemen because they're taking the products given by bigger companies," but "there needs to be some way to reach through the middle."

Gallagher says when retailers offer some options for health-conscious shoppers, it makes "the healthy choice the easy choice" because customers do not have to break normal shopping routines. Some retailers are acknowledging that issue, such as Chicago-based Walgreens, which in 2010 expanded its food selection in drugstores to offer fresh fruits and vegeta-

bles in 10 stores in areas of the city that lacked access to fresh food.

Advocates for access to healthier foods say every initiative counts and that the more choices that are available, the easier it will be for individuals to change their diets. And efforts to decrease food deserts have gained some success: Gallagher reported that the number of Chicago residents who live in food deserts shrank by 58,000 during the last five years. The number of African-Americans in food deserts dropped from 493,919 in 2006 to 422,916 in 2010.

"You need to be conscious of what you're eating and what you're putting in your body. Hypertension and diabetes are some of the diseases really plaguing the African-American communities, which are a majority of our constituents," Jackson says. He adds that initiatives toward providing needy communities with healthier food choices are key to breaking the cycle of unhealthy eating. "We can take care of the awareness, but what happens after the community is aware? ... Working with someone like Fresh Moves allows these resources to come into the community." □



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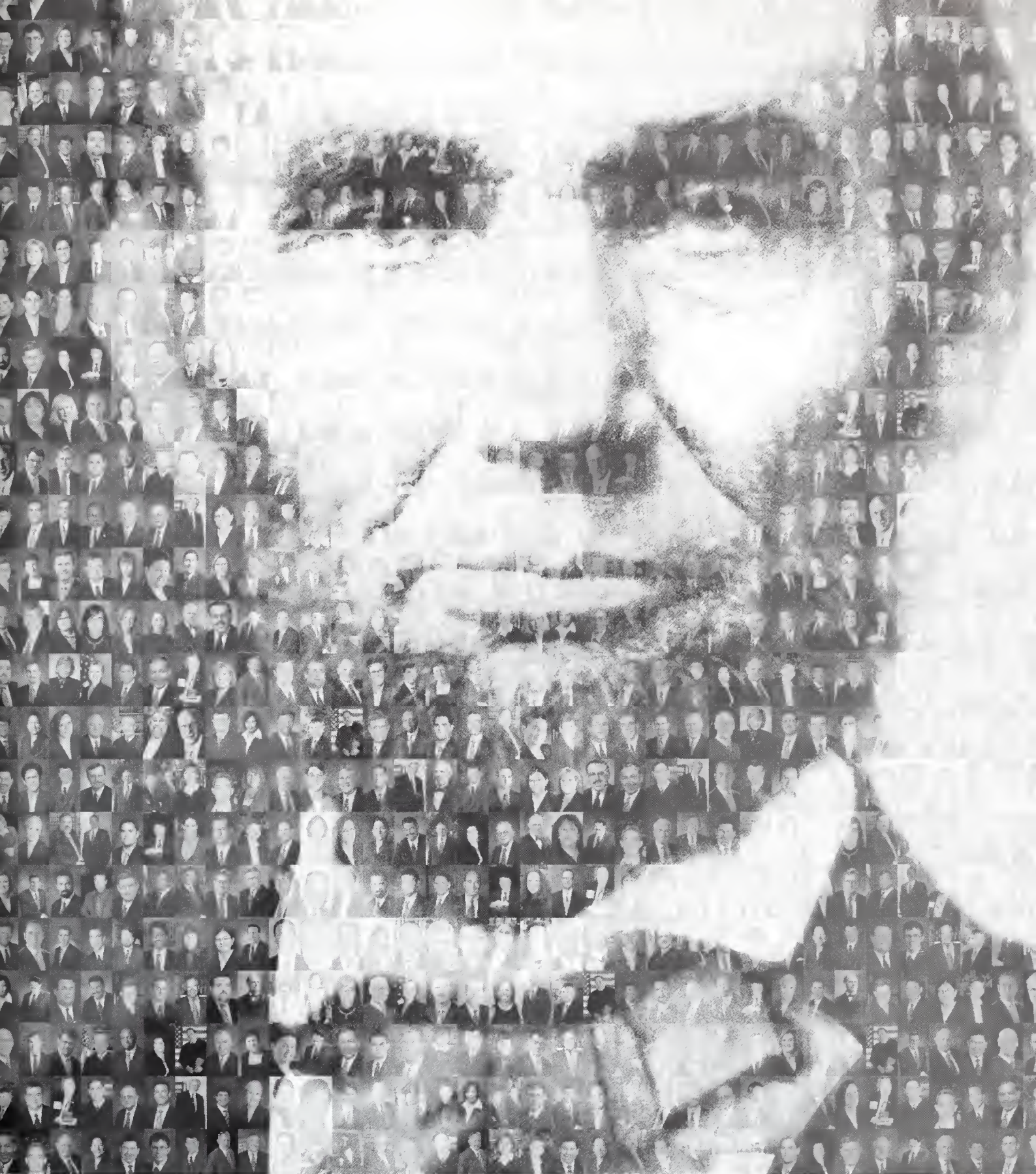
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State historian to take over at Hoover Museum



Tom Schwartz

Tom Schwartz, Illinois' state historian, will leave that position on July 5 to become director of the Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum in West Branch, Iowa.

Schwartz, who has been state historian since 1993,

also serves as the chief historian and director of research for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield.

U.S. Archivist David Ferriero said in a prepared release that Schwartz was selected because of his "extensive experience and knowledge of research library and museum practice."

Schwartz was appointed curator of the Henry Horner Lincoln Collection at the Illinois State Historical Library in 1985.

Andrew Hoover, grandson of the late president said in a prepared release: "Tom's leadership at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, his respect among Lincoln scholars and, most particularly, his experience making Lincoln understandable to popular audiences will be invaluable. Herbert Hoover's life and legacy are still largely unknown, and there is great opportunity to communicate his accomplishments to popular audiences in Iowa and nationwide. The depth and breadth of Tom's experience makes him a wonderful fit for this position."

In the release, Schwartz said: "The Herbert Hoover Presidential Library and Museum is a distinguished research institution supported by an expert staff telling the stories of the Great Humanitarian. I am honored by this appointment, and I look forward to advancing the mission of the library."

Schwartz received bachelor's, master's and doctorate degrees from University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Quinn names new head of Corrections

Salvador "Tony" Godinez, executive director of the Cook County Sheriff's Department of Corrections, was appointed by Gov. Pat Quinn to lead the Illinois Department of Corrections.

He replaces Acting Director Gladys Taylor, who returns to her previous position as assistant director. Taylor replaced Michael Randle, who resigned in September.

Godinez worked for IDOC prior to his career in Cook County. He had been warden of Stateville Correctional Center and chief of operations and chief of staff at IDOC.

Previously, Godinez also served as warden of Ely State Prison, a maximum security facility in Ely, Nev., and as a corrections administrator in Delaware, Louisiana, Michigan and Puerto Rico.

He is a graduate of the University of Illinois Chicago and Chicago State University.

Honors and awards

Jay Rosenstein, an associate professor of journalism at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, won a Peabody Award in late April for his documentary, *The Lord Is Not On Trial Here Today*.

The awards committee of the documentary, which was produced in partnership with WILL-TV, said: "A beautifully researched documentary by a Champaign, Illinois, station, it examines a First Amendment case critical to the establishment of separation of church and state in public schools."

According to WILL: "The film tells the personal story of Vashti McCollum's lawsuit against the Champaign public school system after her son, Jim, was abused by classmates and punished by the school for not taking part in a voluntary Protestant religion class. After she lost in lower court decisions, she won a resounding 8-1 decision in the U.S. Supreme Court, establishing the foundation for the separation of church and state in public schools."

Rosenstein said in a prepared statement, "I am thrilled that this award will help a new generation of Americans learn about the inspirational story and courage of the late Vashti McCollum."

Peabody entries become a permanent part of the Peabody Archive in the University of Georgia Libraries.

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Illinois student wins national contest

A pair of ring-necked ducks painted by a 17-year-old home-schooled student and self-taught artist from Vienna, Ill., in April won first place in the 2011 Federal Junior Duck Stamp Art Contest organized each year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Abraham Hunter's stamp, which first won the statewide contest in mid-March,

was judged by five panelists with expertise in biology, wildlife and environmental conservation. His painting topped more than 27,000 entries from across the country and will appear on the 2011-2012 Federal Junior Duck Stamp on June 24.

Hunter and former Junior Duck Stamp winners are scheduled to attend "The First

Day of Sale" signing ceremony in Katy, Texas.

Hunter, who began painting in 2006, says he has been interested in the outdoors since as early as he can remember and discovered his talent in 2008, the first year that he entered the Illinois State Junior Duck Stamp contest. He says the state allowed him to design the Illinois Duck Stamp for four consecutive years. "The design [this year] has really struck a chord with people, stamp collectors in particular."

He has won the state contest each year since 2008, but this year, his entry made it to the national level of the contest, which is usually won by trained, experienced artists.

Students ages 3 to 17 can enter the annual Illinois State Duck Stamp Contest, which is a precursor to the federal contest. The National Junior Duck Stamp Design Contest is also a component of a yearlong Junior Duck Stamp conservation curriculum taught by K-12 teachers nationally.

Each year, the first-place winner of the contest receives a \$5,000 cash award.

"We're celebrating our 20th anniversary of the Junior Duck Stamp Contest," says Rachel Levin, spokeswoman for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "This is a big milestone for us." Winning stamps cost \$5, and the proceeds are given to fund the education component of the program.

Junior Duck Stamps were first printed in 1992. The contest, which eventually reached all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and two U.S. territories, was established as a way to encourage children in grades K-12 to learn about wetlands and environmental conservation, Levin says.

Hunter takes home his winnings and a lifetime of commemoration from wildlife professionals and his community, all for what he simply says brings him joy. "No, it's not sports or what a lot of people dream about, but it's my dream," Hunter says. "It's been truly amazing."

Hunter has more than 80 paintings and plans to showcase his artwork and enter more stamp contests, such as the Federal Duck Stamp Contest, which he will be eligible for starting in a few months when he turns 18.

Lauren N. Johnson



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School consolidation plan has positives

I am a member of two Illinois Children's Mental Health Partnership committees, a retired McLean County Board member and founder/consultant of the McLean County Community Compact — a 21-year-old consortium of more than 200 leaders in education, business, community and government.

Regarding Gov. [Pat] Quinn's school district consolidation plan, and the studies that predict resulting losses of dollars and education excellence, it would help to look at a related study of the justice system's treatment of drug offenders.

The recent state-commissioned drug study looked at results two ways: a look at Cook County and downstate separately, and a look at the state as a whole. (See *Illinois Issues*, March, page 6.) African-Americans were nearly five times more likely than whites to get prison time in Illinois overall. But for Cook County separately, they were eight times more likely — for unfortunate but obvious reasons.

The consolidation studies by Ohio University and Illinois State University,

as discussed in *Illinois Issues* in April (see page 37 of that issue), apparently did not look two ways. In the article, neither negative report separates out school districts in mega-cities such as Chicago or Cincinnati. Both praised smallness. If they had looked both ways, we could expect differences in education and financial results that would mirror the drug disposition differences.

The point of all this is that Gov. Quinn, looking both ways, is concentrating on Illinois' 200 single-school districts. Not exactly mega-schools! He is talking of redrawing boundaries for only 300 of our ungainly, expensive total of 868 districts. It would seem, then, that the plan is to merge those 200 single-school districts with other small systems. I cannot imagine anything other than a slight swelling of the targeted districts as a result. The outcomes should be very good.

I say more power to him. Schools will be nowhere if state funding collapses, and this kind of combining of one-school districts should diminish that threat.

Barbara Findley Stuart
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Charles N. Wheeler III



Serious belt-tightening is needed to avoid a fiscal meltdown or a tax increase vote

by Charles N. Wheeler III

For the typical Illinois legislator, long-range planning usually means thinking about the next election. Struggling this spring to fashion a new budget, though, lawmakers found themselves worrying about the one after that, too.

The reason for the altered perspective? A dawning realization that serious belt-tightening would be needed now to avoid either a fiscal meltdown or a vote to raise taxes three budget years hence.

At the heart of the dilemma is the income tax increase approved earlier this year. Under its terms, the rates jumped to 5 percent from 3 percent for individuals and to 7 percent from 4.8 percent for corporations as of January 1. The higher rates, along with a suspended tax break for businesses and estate tax changes, are expected to bring in an additional \$7.3 billion in the fiscal year starting July 1.

But the new rates are only temporary, a political selling point, the plan's Democratic authors hope. On January 1, 2015, midway through Fiscal Year 2015, the law calls for the individual rate to drop to 3.75 percent and the corporate rate to 5.25 percent, cutting revenues by more than \$3 billion for the second half of FY 2015 and roughly double that in FY 2016.

Will the rates actually be allowed to go down? At this point, only one thing seems clear: The deeper the cuts in current spending plans, the more likely the challenge can be met.

Will natural economic growth provide enough dollars so that the tax hike can be shaved back without crippling education, health care, human services and other valued programs?

History is not a reliable guide. Consider the fate of the state's two earlier temporary income tax hikes. An 18-month increase was allowed to expire in the mid-1980s, while another temporary rate increase was made permanent in the early 1990s. But the first case does offer an interesting insight on the revenue loss issue.

Early in 1983, then-Gov. Jim Thompson proposed a permanent income tax increase to preserve funding for education and other key state services as a national recession battered state revenues. House Republicans, however, insisted the increase be temporary, and after lengthy negotiations, the final agreement increased the personal rate to 3 percent from 2.5 percent and the corporate rate to 4.8 percent from 4 percent, with the higher rates to sunset on June 30, 1984. Significantly, the final package also included a permanent 1-cent increase in the state

sales tax, to 5 percent from 4 percent, effective January 1, 1984, to help offset the coming loss of income tax receipts, the so-called cliff factor. The plan worked; helped by a recovering economy, state revenues actually grew the year after the higher income tax rates expired.

Will the state experience a similar recovery in the coming years? Will natural economic growth provide enough dollars so that the tax hike can be shaved back without crippling education, health care, human services and other valued programs? The prognosis is imprecise; the further into the future one looks into the revenue estimating crystal ball, the murkier the picture.

Of course, four years from now, lawmakers and whoever is governor could decide to make the higher rates permanent, as some, including your author, would argue they should have done in the first place. The option seems sure to be a major issue in the 2014 elections, when voters will choose a governor, two-thirds of the Senate and the entire House. Remember, the fate of the temporary 1989 increase was a major issue in 1990, and voters chose Republican Jim Edgar, who said he'd make it permanent, over Democrat Neil Hartigan, who pledged to let it expire.

Or, drawing from the 1983 experience, the state's future leaders could find a way to replace some of the lost income tax

revenues so funding for important programs doesn't fall off the proverbial cliff. A recent report from the legislature's fiscal agency suggests one intriguing possibility: expanding the base of the state sales tax to include certain services.

In its study, the Commission on Government Forecasting and Accountability noted that as much as \$8.5 billion could be generated if the current sales tax base included a broad base of services. If business-to-business transactions were excluded, about \$4 billion could be raised.

Revenue production aside, including certain services in the sales tax base would reflect more accurately modern economic activity. Illinois, like many other states, enacted a sales tax to replace the state property tax, its main revenue source for 115 years, after property values plummeted during the Great Depression. Back then, most economic activity involved the exchange of tangible items, the base of the tax.

But the economy has changed dramatically. The commission report noted that

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service-related industries accounted for not quite a third of the state's economy in 1977, but almost half by 2009. Moreover, Illinois currently taxes only a handful of services, mostly related to public utilities, so there's room to expand. The Federation of Tax Administrators lists 168 different service categories that are taxed in the United States. Illinois taxes just 17, while the average state taxes 56; Hawaii covers 160, New Mexico and Washington, 158 apiece.

Taxing services is not a new idea, of course. Almost 30 years ago, Thompson sought such an expansion, to no avail. Currently, as part of a plan to modernize

the state's revenue structure, the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability, a Chicago-based think tank, has recommended taxing more than 40 personal, automotive, entertainment and other consumer services to produce more than \$2 billion in new revenue.

In his ill-fated push for a service tax on consumer-related activity, Thompson liked to point out that if one buys a new pair of shoes, the price includes the cost of the wages paid the craftsman who made them, all subject to the sales tax. So, the governor would ask, why shouldn't the sales tax also cover the labor of the cobbler who repairs them, and not just the cost of a new heel?

Applying that rationale through a tax on consumer services would better reflect economic activity in the state and, more importantly, increase the chances that the higher income tax rates can be rolled back without serious damage to vital programs. □

Charles N. Wheeler III is director of the Public Affairs Reporting program at the University of Illinois Springfield.

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